





Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

12.17.13
H Theol

GRACE-CULTURE,

OR

THOUGHTS ON

GRACE, GROWTH, AND GLORY.

BY

EZRA M. HUNT, M. D.

“GRACE BE WITH YOU ALL.”

“GROW IN GRACE.”

“YE SHALL APPEAR WITH HIM IN GLORY.”

PHILADELPHIA:
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,
No. 821 CHESTNUT STREET.

Entered according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1864, by

THE TRUSTEES OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court for the Eastern District
of Pennsylvania.

STEREOTYPED BY WILLIAM W. HARDING.

2993

8/5/1890

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE.....	5
CHAPTER I.	
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS—GRACE.....	9
CHAPTER II.	
GROWTH IN GRACE.....	20
CHAPTER III.	
DIRECT REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD GROW IN GRACE.....	28
CHAPTER IV.	
PRE-REQUISITES TO GROWTH IN GRACE.....	53
CHAPTER V.	
MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.	
Prayer—Reading the Scriptures.....	86
CHAPTER VI.	
MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.	
(Continued.)	
Proper Observance of the Sabbath—The Public and Social Exercise of Religion.....	118
CHAPTER VII.	
MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.	
(Continued.)	
The Sacraments.....	143

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

Systematic Benevolence—The Study of Christ in his Offices, Teachings, and Example—The Study of the Lives of those Eminent for Piety.....	PAGE 171
--	-------------

CHAPTER IX.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

Self-Examination—Fasting.....	190
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

Personal Effort for the Salvation of Others—Intercourse with Fellow-Christians.....	219
---	-----

CHAPTER XI.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

Watchfulness—Obedience to the Laws of our Nature—A Recognition of the true Relations of our Worldly Business to our Spiritual Life—Prosperity and Adversity.....	248
--	-----

CHAPTER XII.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

Contemplation of the Rest that Remaineth for the People of God.....	273
---	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

EVIDENCES OF GROWTH IN GRACE.....	281
-----------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

RESULTS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

Holiness—Happiness—Heaven—Conclusion.....	289
---	-----

PREFACE.

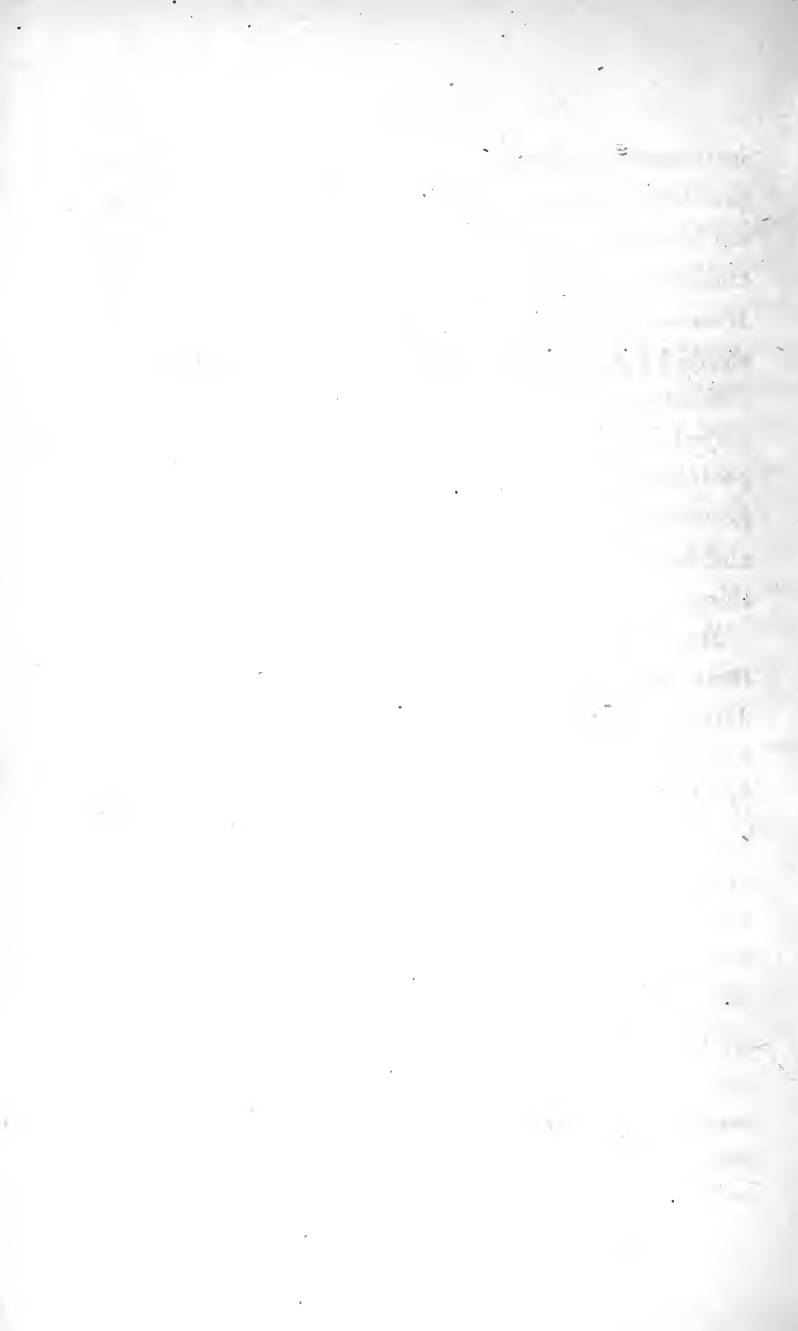
THIS book needs but a brief preface. To those who have not yet repented of sin, and who have no hope of heaven through the merits of Jesus Christ, it will have but little interest. Those who have never sought and obtained grace unto salvation, cannot be expected to regard or appreciate it, when viewed in connection with growth therein. They who already feel the importance of the theme, and who are making it their business in life to advance in holiness, will need no persuasion of ours to read it. The very title will allure them to peruse the volume, in the hope that some suggestion may be of service in directing to an active progress in the way of holy obedience. To those who are within the pale of the Christian church, and yet not making increase in holiness, I can only address the earnest persuasion that they will carefully and prayerfully look into these pages, for the purpose of recognizing their duty, and receiving direction as to the method of its

fulfilment. Growth in grace is the Christian's great business on earth. If the entire membership of Christ only felt this, how different would be the history of the Church! Coldness and lukewarmness would not give to so many the appearance of a merely nominal Christianity. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is not only the natural, earnest question of the believer at the time of his conversion, but one which he will consider all along his course. In seeking the answer of this question for myself, I have been prompted to offer some thoughts upon these two subjects: "How the sinner shall be saved," and, "How and why the Christian should grow in grace." In deciding which of these should, in the form of a small book, first occupy my attention, I have given precedence to the latter; because it seemed to me the more important. Not only is it a vital subject in itself, but it includes the other. The sanctification of the church is God's motive power for the conversion of sinners. It is the prominent means by which the Spirit makes itself felt, not only in our own hearts, but upon mankind at large. Says an able Divine—"God will not have the evangelizing of the world advance faster, than the sanctifying of his church." Growth in grace, while it is the natural exercise of the principle implanted in the renewed heart, thus becomes not only the grand method of sanctification to the believer, but also the

instrumentality for the world's conversion. It is to impress these ideas, to show the means of carrying them out in practice, and to illustrate the connection of grace and glory therewith, that these pages have been written. If ever a mortal can reach the depths of humility, it should be in dwelling upon such a theme; for who is sufficient to compass the deep affection of God, as displayed in his grace, in the means of growth he has provided, and the rich inheritance he has prepared in heaven for his people? Yet by his word, his providence, and his works, we are encouraged to look into these things.

May the God of all grace bless the attempt, so that these contemplations may impress upon every reader his duty, and awaken his zeal; and thus aid in upbuilding his chosen ones in the faith, and making them more meet for the inheritance of the saints in glory.

E. M. H.



GRACE, GROWTH, AND GLORY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS—GRACE.

To the Christian, there is no word more full of intense interest and meaning than the word Grace. Around it cluster all the affections and desires of the renewed soul; for it is in itself the divine centre of all our religious experience and hope. In a single monosyllable it introduces us to the glory of the plan of salvation, and brings before us all the joyful results of a change of heart. It is not only the first word of Faith which the convicted sinner spells out as he weeps and waits at the foot of the Cross; but the constant watchword with which he summons his heart to diligence, after he has tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious.

As he who has been renewed by the Spirit first apprehends the change, and beholds the whole current of his life setting in a new direction, he can only look up to the source of this sublime redemption, and cry out, "*It is all of grace.*" Christian experience, with its manifold temptations and triumphs, its conflicts and victories, can only repeat with increasing emphasis

the song ; day after day, and year after year, it grows in meaning and power, until grace itself ripens into glory.

“By grace are ye saved.” What more need we say, in order to enforce the propriety, and prove the necessity of seeking fully to comprehend this, the Christian’s banner word ? Though we study it a lifetime we shall never comprehend its fulness ; for it is not one idea, but a host ; a fountain from which a single drop is life-giving, and each successive draught creates a desire for new supplies. Nothing can be more profitable for the Christian, than to endeavour to appreciate the fullest meaning of this grace of which we speak ; since with it, and growth therein, are associated all that constitutes true happiness in this life, and all that secures eternal blessedness in the next.

I. OUR FIRST AND MOST CONSTANT IDEA OF GRACE MUST
BE THAT IT IS A FAVOUR.

That which we earn, we are not disposed to be especially thankful for ; and since gratitude is necessary to the enjoyment of grace, and the remotest conception of desert on our part at once destroys the word, we must see in it unmerited kindness, supernatural love. It is Christ coming after us, as we are running hither and thither in the highways of sin, and bidding us to the marriage supper, not because we deserve it, but only because his mercy invites us. We are not slow to appreciate the value of those gratuitous benefits which we receive from our fellow men, and they awaken in us sentiments and feelings belonging to the kindlier side of human nature. But Grace is the grand summing up of all favours ; at once the foundation and sublime superstructure of our hope. The

first laid corner-stone is a gift, and each succeeding element a mercy ; until the highest pinnacle is reared with shoutings of " Grace, Grace unto it." The boldest figures, the most graphic delineations, the most pathetic illustrations, drawn from the earth, are all earthy, in comparison with this favour. He who could and would give us all the wealth of time ; who could raise us from the bed of wasting disease to perfect health ; who would snatch our child from devouring flames, and restore it safe to its mother's arms ; or in the shipwreck and amid the howling tempest, when the last ray of hope had left us, would raise us from the waters of death, would do something for us that all words would fail to express. But grace exceeds them all. It is a favour beyond comparison. It gives us treasures which never fail, health which never dies, a Friend who will never forsake us, and an everlasting rescue from deeper and darker waters than ocean ever rolled, from a second death more horrible than any yawning gulf of time has ever threatened.

II. IT IS A DIVINE FAVOUR.

Come and look, O thou redeemed soul, for a moment into the pit from whence thou wast delivered, and see by whom thy salvation came. It is God, the God who is Love, who is thy Benefactor. It is not a mortal that helps thee, else both thou and thy helper might weary and fall. It is not an inferior, or an equal ; but one so far superior, that language has no words to express the exaltation. The favour is all divine. As much as is Eternity more grand than time, or Infinity than the finite, or the King Immortal, Invisible, and Eternal, above the worm man, so much is the greatness of this favour enhanced by its Divinity. We cannot measure it by

the mensuration of this world, it is only to be calculated by the arithmetic of heaven. Its greatness, its intensity, its omnipotence, its omnipresence, and all its attributes, are as limitless as God. So divine is this favour; so full, so exhaustless is this grace.

We cannot attempt to grasp the benignity and condescension of this mercy, until we study its divine origin. When the princes of this earth, even with great ceremony, permit us to appear in special audience before them, the honour is so highly appreciated, as to be often referred to afterwards; but ours is incomparably a greater favour. The High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity makes the first approach, and stops not with the blessing of a passing presence, but confers upon us riches so divine that human tongue cannot describe them. They are only to be felt, and loved, and enjoyed, until we are fitted to ascend to Him from whom they come.

III. IT IS A FREE GIFT.

This is not always included in the worldly sense of favour. There may be with men some hesitation between the inclinations of benevolence and the cautiousness of restraint, which sometimes moderates the fulness of the cordiality; or if no adequate return is expected, yet sinister motives may exert a secret or unrecognized influence.

But the gift of grace is free without measure, free beyond the possibility of reward. Its author is in every way independent of the recipient, and yet by the munificence of his love, takes grand advantage of our need, making man's dependence the richest occasion of goodness and mercy.

The freeness only adds to the fulness of the blessing. It treats us not as menial subjects, but as those whom he delighteth

to honour. It adds thereto all the glory of a victory won ; of a liberty purchased by blood ; yet frees us from the suffering, while it gives us the reward. Oh that we may feel more this sacred compassion ! There is no mortal freeness like this ; for it is the sublime love of an all powerful and all wise Friend, fully engaged on our side, pledged for our deliverance. In such a view, how despicable the merit of works ! What is there in our own efforts that can add a drop to the ocean fulness of this free gift ?

IV. IT IS AN ILL-DESERVED GIFT—NOT ONLY A FAVOUR DIVINE, UNEARNED, AND FREE, BUT CONFERRED AMIDST ENORMOUS AND FLAGRANT ILL-DESERT.

Ours was not a condition of mere passive existence or negative disobedience. We are not only undeserving of the gift, but positive sin renders us scarce fit subjects for the blessing. We are not only unworthy, but our unworthiness is culpable and intense. Like Esau, we have parted with our birthright for a mess of pottage, and have despised the first offers of mercy. We are like the poor prisoner who had been left so long in his cell, that its sombre walls and cold bars were his intimates, and the cobwebs and spiders his loved companions, so that he was loathe to leave them.

Every claim to compassion has been forfeited. Actual sin puts its brazen breastplate upon us, its ponderous shield before us, its coat of mail about us, to repel all these assaults of love. But blessed be God ! he puts his Spirit within us. In the midst of our ingratitude, he presses his unmerited favour upon us. His is not a passive but an active love. Our very ill-desert has hardened us, and there is something to be overcome. He not only offers—he persuades. He not only stands—he

waits to be gracious. He not only receives, but with open arms he meets us, and welcomes us in the rags and tatters of ill-desert, if we will only accept in their place the garments radiant with a Saviour's righteousness. "He pardons like a God." With the right to the gift, we have forfeited the appreciation of it; and his grace must be aggressive, contending with us, yet for us, until it convinces us of ill-desert, and then, in its place, confers the merit of our Redeemer. It is free pardon to one, without cause a rebel against his Sovereign, while still in an active opposition which by no possibility can injure the King; a release to the prisoner whom Satan has bound these many years, while he is living ungrateful for the very mercies of his daily life; a pitying forgiveness to a harmless enemy. Who is not melted when one upon whom he has forfeited all claims to compassion, rescues him from certain ruin, and proves a friend in need? Who is not melted when he beholds God the Father, Christ the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, covering his rebellion with arms of love, just at the time that its consequences are searing the soul, and lulling it for eternal wailings? God grant that we who have a hope in Christ may daily see more and more clearly how little we deserve this grace.

V. IT IS AN IMMENSE GIFT.

Gold and silver and precious stones are worse than dross before it. His grace to us commenced in creation, it culminated in redemption, but it knows no waning or decrease. "He giveth more grace." How shall we comprehend the immensity of this gift? What better can we do than to keep fresh in view the grand facts of the mission, sufferings, and death of our crucified but risen Redeemer? "He died for His enemies." How many

have ever given this much for their friends? Who else ever freely, voluntarily, cheerfully died for his enemies? "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." When all his prophets had failed, God sent his only begotten and well-beloved Son to take our nature and suffer in our stead. So immense was the gift that none but he could give it; and Christ was given, because all things else combined approached not to a sufficiency. Look up, Christian! Behold the world around you so full of treasures, so bountiful with wealth, so luxuriant in production, so munificent in all its arrangements. But oh! give it all, and it is not one jot or tittle toward saving one soul. Go forth on a cloudless night and see the starry worlds above; learn that the countless hosts of these are but the suns of universes still beyond. Yet these are not enough for a soul. They cannot suffice as a sacrifice to atone for one sin. Christ is given, because all things else are valueless for salvation. But the living Christ is not enough. The penalty of transgression must be paid; and nothing but his suffering and death can satisfy the debt. His divinity by no means diminished the sufferings of his humanity, but intensified them beyond expression. That soul agony was a real intensity of suffering. That bloody sweat was a real anguish of the flesh. Those cruel mockings and scourgings were felt as only such a sufferer could feel. That spear thrust into the side carried with it the pangs of mortal pain. Those spikes driven through the sensitive nerve net-work of the palm and pinning down the feet, stung with agony; and yet it was the willing gift for us. Had he insisted upon it, a word would have rid him from the cross, but we should have lost the crown. But he was unwilling that man's redemption should fail, though it must be purchased with tears and sweat, with agony and blood, with the betrayal of false

friends, the doubts of true ones, and the malefactor's death. How immense the suffering he bore! "Ye are bought with a price" not easily redeemed, and all this a gift to you. It was not the numerical value of the number of souls to be saved, but the worth of a soul that led to such a sacrifice. He died for us personally. He was thy Redeemer. But the immensity of this gift is not yet circled. We have not only bestowed upon us the Immanuel, a God with us, but the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, as a guide by whose help we pass from grace to grace, until we attain "the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." We cannot compute the immensity of the favour any more than we can scan the universe with a material eye. With the utmost stretch of our spiritual vision, we can only catch faint glimpses of the glory. We now know only in part; but if we have accepted this immense gift, we shall hereafter know even as we are known. Yet even here we may follow on to know the Lord.

This grace is enhanced by the favourable surroundings which God has conferred upon it. It is not only offered, but made available. It is presented to us amidst strong inducements, and much is conferred upon us independent of its acceptance. So far from its being a formal or barren proposal, our Creator has done much to incline us to embrace it.

Life with all its privileges, reason with all its endowments, a birth and education amidst Christian institutions and associations, what are these but so many stepping-stones to the height of this mount of privilege? Divine favours of a temporal nature are sprinkled all along our pathways, that we may be persuaded to receive the grace of a spiritual life. We are made partakers of finite bestowments, that we may be allured to choose infinite mercy, and immortal peace.

How merciful is God to us all! While we walked in our own ways, "he left not himself without a witness in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." "His mercies are new every morning, and fresh every evening." He even sustains his enemies, that he may give them the opportunity to become his friends. His goodness alone should lead us earnestly to seek his salvation. To the sinner, by the human principles of gratitude, it would seem that these should be enough to win him to Christ; but to the Christian all these mercies are surroundings of love, aiding him in growth and holiness. The unceasing stream of daily benefits is so laden with God's munificence, that we only need to survey it, in order to find it commending the grace of God, and building us up in the most holy faith.

This grace is accompanied to our hearts by an advocate, and sustained by the special presence of the Holy Spirit. No more precious or heart-cheering promise illumines the pages of inspiration, than that which Christ made to his disciples, when about to leave them for the glories of the Father's presence. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of truth." "I will not leave you orphans." "The Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." What grace! The Father rules for us, the Son dies for us, the Spirit comes to abide with us. The gift of the Holy Ghost was the

grand Omega of the work of redemption. It was the re-stamping of God's image upon the soul of man; that image which sin had marred, and well nigh erased. It was the implanting within us of a new principle of holiness, to overcome the corruptions of the flesh, and to incline us to accept the proffered salvation. But it was not only to be the sinner's prompter, but the Christian's abiding friend. The Spirit was to remain with us. Too often we speak of it, and pray for it, as if it were only meant to be an occasional visitant. It is for us always a resident.

Oh doubting, trembling saint! thou art not left to tread the billows alone, for this Spirit is at thy side. God hath not left himself without a witness within thee; and here is the pledge of thine ultimate triumph. Though Satan may tempt and allure, a stronger than he has a temple and a dwelling-place in thy heart.

Doubt and despair well might seize upon us, if left to ourselves; and they would be the more natural, if we were compelled to look upon the Father as high and lifted up, and the Son as occupying a throne at a distance from us; but with the Holy Spirit, the blessed Comforter within us, we have access by faith into this grace, "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

The germ of growth has been implanted within our souls, that it may spring up to everlasting life, and has been accompanied by that power which not only can "keep us from falling, but present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

How perfect the chain of our hope! How complete the circuit of Divine love! God, the mighty God, our Friend, our

Father ; Christ our Saviour, our Mediator, our Advocate ; the Spirit our Helper, and Comforter. The Father mercifully inclined and omnipotently able to save us ; the Son accepted by him as Mediator, in his own person having satisfied the law, and now pleading for us with intercessions irresistible ; and the Spirit within us, a God in very deed dwelling with men, enabling us to avail ourselves of the benefits which flow from our salvation.

Such aid in holiness to grow
Is thus vouchsafed to saints below ;
Such gracious love beyond compare
The Father, Son, and Spirit bear.

Ought we not to grow in this grace ?

CHAPTER II.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

WE have, in a few particulars, viewed the grace of God, and may, from them all, define it to be that intense interest which he exhibits in fallen man, and that full provision which he has made for the salvation and sanctification of those who deserve nothing but his wrath.

Such is grace defined in its relationship to God. Naturally and directly from this, the term has a reference to man, and in him it imports both a change of heart by the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit, and those attributes, affections, and desires, which are the fruits of the Spirit, and secure the divine favour.

I. GRACE FROM BEING DIVINE IN ITS ORIGIN, BECOMES
HUMAN IN ITS APPLICATION.

Like the seed of a fragrant and blooming plant, it is dropped into the mire of our human natures, and converts its loathsomeness into beauty, its deformity into the likeness of Christ, until we are renewed, purified, sanctified here, and made meet for an inheritance of glory hereafter. From the time grace becomes the possession of the believer, a new element is introduced into its history. Its expansive power is transferred to

us, and our wills and efforts are concerned in its future development. The fruit is not uniform in every soul. Though conferred upon us, and endowed with inherent efficiency, and enforced by the power of the Spirit, God has ordained means for its culture and growth, and placed these under our control. We are made partakers in such a sense that we become actual parties, not only to its benefits, but its acquirements. Even the Holy Spirit, whose presence and assistance is indispensable, is only promised liberally to those that ask it.

Having obtained help, it is ours to decide whether we shall stand still, fall back, or press forward ; and having once become an heir of glory, there is no prescribed limit to our progress. The more we desire, the more shall we have. The supply will ever equal the capacity, and the capacity increase with our longings and strivings, and the proper use of means.

Though the conception and primitive application of the work of grace is all of God, man is not a mere passive recipient of its effects. The power of the Godhead is made available for us ; but our advancement is not compulsory. The instituted means must be used, or we shall sadly linger along the pathway of life. It is graciously ordered and permitted that we should be active co-workers in carrying on the work of grace, especially in our own hearts.

In the material world, although God must give us that world, and endow us with reason, health, and ability to use it, and even grant his rain, and sunshine, and seasons to support its growth, we do not sit idly down and leave all the product thus to be attained ; and in the Kingdom of Grace we have just as real, and far more important active exertions to put forth. Cultivation, cultivation is the *watchword* of grace as well as of nature. Conversion is not the completed work of grace in the

soul. Perfect so far as it goes, and glorious beyond description, it is but the foundation upon which is to be reared the superstructure of religious experience and development. It is an adoption into the family, a grand welcoming to all the privileges of the sons of God ; but it is not as yet, on our part, a full appreciation, or a full ability to partake of all these blessings. "It is," says Bishop Hall, "for God and for Omnipotency to do mighty things in a moment, but degreely to grow in greatness is the course that he hath left for man." The work of life is our sanctification—our growth in holiness. For this the abiding Spirit has been promised us, and for this Christianity has in its very nature been endowed with a progressive power. Its author has made it a principle incapable of a passive existence. It seeks and will find a development, both in one's self and in the world about us. If it be hid, it is like leaven hid in three measures of meal, until the whole is leavened. It will diffuse its power through the soul, and manifest itself in the conduct and efforts of the possessor. "The man who says enough," says Augustine, "that man is lost."

Though works do not constitute religion, yet they are the harvest, and serve as no unimportant index of spiritual life. Religion must have its appropriate fruit ; and where there are leaves instead of figs, thistles instead of cultivated crops, barrenness instead of fruitfulness, there is a call for the most rigid scrutiny and self-examination. God may impart his grace to the sinner in his last hour, and bid the dying thief celebrate his soul's birth-day in Paradise ; but such is not the rule of his kingdom. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, with the assurance that God will work in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. We are to fear lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should seem

to come short of it; and this fear or holy *carefulness* must make us unceasingly watchful and wakeful to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

Thus the Christian's growth in grace becomes not a theoretical but a practical theme. Its inseparable connection with grace itself makes it, so far as man is concerned, the vital question of spiritual life.

II. EVEN IN THE MATERIAL WORLD, GROWTH AND FRUIT ARE THE CHIEF SIGNS OF LIFE.

Where for a continued period no vitality can be perceived, we are not slow in discerning the proofs of death; and seldom do results falsify our observations. We ask and look for results, and God, in his living world, does not disappoint our expectations. We must not in grace disappoint his. Relations of cause and effect are as palpable here as in nature, and will follow each other in sublime sequence; thus from his beginnings, by our culture and his aid, rearing the evidences of prolific abundance. The barren tree is as much a blot upon the kingdom of grace as upon that of nature; and, though in mercy the command to cut it down may be for a little while delayed, ere long the decree will go forth. Oh! Christian, if thou givest no signs of spiritual life, complain not if thou be mistaken for the dead; for if thou wilt wrap grave clothes about thee, thy place is not with the living. Take a step forward, if thou wouldst convince thyself and the world that thou art alive. Even the century plant, though it blooms but once in a hundred years, grows the meanwhile. But alas! for the professed Christian, who has neither growth, nor fruit, nor flowers. Winter and frost, ice and snow, belong to matter, but

not to the soul. Cold forms no part of the economy of grace. Life, warmth, spring, sunshine, growth, expansion, vigour, are its continuous and progressive attributes. In it is no darkness at all.

III. PARTIAL OR IMPERFECT GROWTH IS NOT SATISFACTORY TO US IN NATURE; AND SHOULD NOT BE IN GRACE.

The stunted oak, the dwarfed and tangled wildwood, do not fill us with admiration, as do stately forests, or the cedars of Lebanon. We look not only for some result from the action of well understood laws, but for a result commensurate with the means used, and the changes wrought. Dwarfishness is not symmetrical, or admirable; but full, healthy, vigorous, uniform development is. In grace there is nothing stunted, nothing reserved. There is no reason why this life should not be a steady growth, a continued progress. The cause is adequate to the production of elaborate effect. We are surrounded with the sources of continued expansion. We are not to be contented with the evidence that we are just alive; but a healthy strength, a vigorous vitality, is attainable. The life which is by faith upon the Son of God is full of *tonic power, and soul-health is its reward.*

IV. GROWTH IN GRACE HAS NOT AN INTERMITTENT OR FITFUL SUPPLY.

There is a fountain ever open, a guide ever near, a welcome ever hearty. It is an ocean without its ebb, a source without exhaustion. Perennial nurture should be the constant result

of perennial fulness. No retrograde movement is excusable. It should be a steady progress onward ; for He giveth more grace. Grace is added to grace, and the triumphs of the past prepare for greater victories in the future.

Truly the corruptions of sin are within us and must at times annoy and perplex ; but grace *reigns*, and these are recognized as rebels, not as kings. They are brought more and more under dominion ; we steadily advance in their subjugation, until the kingdom of grace becomes *established* within us. Our advance is proportioned to the fulness and regularity of our supply. It is a growing brighter and brighter unto the eternal day. It is a vigorous, steady vitality, in the world, yet more and more separated from its evil ; like the growing oak, rising higher, spreading out its arms towards heaven ; like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; whose leaf also shall not wither.

V. GROWTH IS THAT WHICH RENDERS THE WORLD ABOUT US BEAUTIFUL ; AND IT IS GROWTH TOO WHICH MUST BRING OUT THE BEAUTIES OF HOLINESS.

Had the Creator seen fit, he might have presented to us the globe, not only perfect, but complete. But it was a greater mercy to present it having in itself the elements of completion, budding, blossoming, advancing, and not a still monotony of finished existence. Thus ever teeming with successive luxuriance, production and reproduction follow each other in joyful succession, each in its turn accomplishing results having a direct bearing upon the phenomena of growth.

As we pass from nature to grace the analogy expands into a more glowing reality. Growth is the beautiful principle of

Christian vitality, no less than of vegetable life. Its lineaments have been traced upon Christianity as with the finger of God. It exhibits the Christian in his true element, in his true proportions, a redeemed one filling each day more symmetrically the garments of Christ's righteousness, and at last adorning the robe which he has prepared for them that love him.

There is even upon earth tangible, appreciable, beauty in the growing Christian. There is a constant dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. The passions dwell together in subdued harmony ; the soul is more and more affected by a sense of its own unworthiness, and more intent upon the copy of Christ's likeness. There is the sweet unfolding which we see in the passing panorama of the tasteful artist ; or better still, in that grand panorama of nature, where each plant, and shrub, and tree appropriates the means of life, and with leaf, and bud, and flower, hastens to produce each its own appropriate fruit. It is only in the flourishing Christian that the beauty and glory of our holy religion are evidently set forth to our view.

So far is Christianity above the sordid and morbid tastes of our fallen humanity, that in order to enforce and illustrate it, it was necessary that the Saviour himself in his personal presence should set the pattern, and cast the mould ; and now that he has gone to be our advocate on high, it is in the growth and development of his chosen followers, that the symmetry and perfection thereof are to be declared. A life advancing in holiness is the expressed beauty of the gospel plan. It is God through the mercy of Christ continuing to be manifested in the flesh, and the only thing that can surround the fallen nature of man with the ineffable lustre of the ascended and glorified Redeemer.

But we need not rely upon analogies drawn from earth to

show that the Christian life should be a progress. There are abundant arguments which address themselves to our reason and experience, conclusively showing that growth in grace is an essential part of our Christianity. These we shall have occasion to notice in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER III.

DIRECT REASONS WHY THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD
GROW IN GRACE.

I. THE VERY THEORY OF A CHRISTIAN BELIEF REQUIRES IT.

That belief is of no common character. It perceives man lost by nature, and by his own acts ; prone to sin, a rebel from God and deserving eternal punishment ; and yet saved by the only one that could save him, upon whom he had forfeited all claims of compassion. If conversion was a reality, this favour has already been recognized as one in comparison with which all earthly blessings are insignificant ; and we cannot contemplate the mercy, without adding emotion to emotion, love to love. Thus growth becomes an innate principle of our spiritual life. If we have enjoyed the Divine favour, it is impossible not to desire more thereof. Our sincerity will lead us to look to its source, and so live as to secure it ; and doing this, growth in grace is already a present experience.

Can one feel that he has been plucked as a brand from the everlasting burning, and not increase in praise for that deliverance ? Can one believe a Saviour's gratuitous agony and death have delivered him from eternal woe, and not grow more thankful every time the thought passes through his mind ? Can one obtain a foretaste of the joys of Redeeming love, and not long to increase in holiness ? Can one have a proper sense

of his sin and his pardon, his peril by nature and his rescue by grace, and be unmoved?

The veriest Stoic, who could call to his aid only the cold, rigid analyses of philosophy, and the unemotional deductions of logic, could prove to a demonstration that the true Christian must be a *growing Christian*. He would not even need to be warmed by the fire of converted zeal, or breathed upon by the influences of the Holy Spirit, to show that growth is an indispensable result of grace. He would detect in Christianity settled in the heart, a power of expansion resistless and immense. And yet the scope of his vision is but as thick darkness, compared with those rays which light up the Christian's pathway, and show him his privileges, destiny, and reward. Matthew Henry was right when he said, "Grace, if it be true, *will be growing*." It is a part of its possession as much as the pulsation of the heart is a part of its life. He who, believing himself to have been renewed by the Spirit of God, is willing to sit idly down and content himself without further effort, has a present evidence that he is mistaken. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" is not only the language of the convicted sinner, but also the daily inquiry of the converted saint.

II. THE COMMON SENTIMENT OF GRATITUDE ENFORCES GROWTH IN GRACE.

The first emotion we have when we have received a kindness from another, is how best to exhibit our appreciation of it. The drowning man, rescued from a watery grave, does not stop to criticise the method or the motive of his benefactor, or to find some other plan by which he might have been recovered. But it is enough for him to know that he is saved, and by

whom ; and then he will in some way convey the evidence of his gratitude ; and if from this friend there is a daily repetition of unnumbered mercies, will he ever cease endeavouring to secure his approbation ?

But how feeble, alas ! all comparisons, or rather contrasts drawn from the kindness of men, to set forth the loving-kindness of the Lord ! How feeble they seem to him upon whom has been bestowed that grace, which has the promise both of the life which now is, and of that which is to come !

For all this opulence of love but one return on our part is possible ; and that is to grow in grace. The highest evidence of gratitude we can exhibit, is to obtain more by recognizing and using what we have ; and then He giveth more abundantly. On our way with our thanks, he meets us with new grace. Of his fulness we receive grace for grace until we grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ. Surely when we review the goodness of God, we cannot be content to be stationary Christians, but must resolve with Addison in his beautiful hymn of thanksgiving :

“ Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue,
And after death, in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew.”

III. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE BECAUSE THE MATERIALS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH ARE ACCESSIBLE AND EX- HAUSTLESS.

With the title there is an admission to all the privileges of the sons of God. They that were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. The wall of partition has been broken

down, and the union between God and his people is such, that the infinite abundance of grace is proffered to us. He furnishes the table in our very presence, bestows the appetite, and welcomes us to the feast. "We have access with confidence." All the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Christ; and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. Oh! that we might recognize more fully how the materials for building us up in the most holy faith are placed at our disposal; not rough hewn, but stones polished after the similitude of a temple, fashioned ready for appropriation. If ever in doubt as to the nearness of access, read from the 15th to the 18th chapter of St. John's Gospel. Indeed the Bible is full of assurance that if we will draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us.

Relationships have been established, the Spirit has been granted, a Saviour has been provided, public and private ordinances have been instituted, the sacred Sabbath appointed, and the church planted in the world, that we might have material aid in the expansion and elevation of our piety. The materials for increase in holiness are as wide-spread as the tidings of salvation. The same compassion which imparts life to the soul dead in trespasses and sins, provides the means for its sustenance. No costly oblation, or rigorous ritual observances, make the way tedious or burdensome. But we come with boldness to the throne of grace, and find grace to help in every time of need. It is a Father listening to the requests of a child, with all the inclinations of tender affection, and granting liberally all the facilities for improvement.

But the materials of growth are as exhaustless as they are accessible. They too, as well as our first grace, are derived from a source which knows no limitation. Giving does not impoverish, or withholding enrich the author. Our God is the

Lord God, merciful and gracious, great in his mercy to them that fear him ; Christ our elder brother is full of grace, and his promise to believers is, " Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." The Spirit is a spirit of grace " not given by measure."

In the whole language of grace there is no such word as exhaustion. The ocean itself is feeble in the expression of its infinite fulness. And if the gift of grace which saved our souls has in no way diminished the supply, but only made us the heirs and partakers of more, surely the materials for our growth are exhaustless.

In conversion God has come down to us, and taking us from the mire of sin, has imparted a power of progress ; and we have the assurance, so far as our spiritual desires are concerned, that we shall not want any good thing if we use the provided means. There is not only no limit to Christ's fulness, but by our adoption no limit to the materials for grace-growth. The mandate " Go on to perfection" is not a command without the means. The power and the assistance are abundantly conferred, and the result more nearly attained until completed in heaven. The means of grace are means of growth in grace, and it is only in the use of these, that we arrive at the stature of the fulness, and become strong men and women in Christ Jesus. God grant that we may with all diligence thus go from strength to strength, until we appear before God in Zion.

IV. THERE IS A COMPREHENSIBLE LAW AND METHOD OF GROWTH IN GRACE WHICH MAKES IT THE MORE REASONABLE AND EASY TO BE SECURED.

To the unconverted man the Christian life is necessarily a mystery. He may have learned many things ; but he has

not yet been taught in the school of Christ. He must taste and see that the Lord is gracious. If any man do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. He cannot, by any exertion of reason or emotion, place himself in the position of the saved soul. These may assist faith, but faith alone can rend the veil in twain. But to the Christian there is a new world opened, a new life begun. The law of growth in grace is a law of cause and effect. He grows, because he uses the means; he is a dwarf, because he does not use them. He may grow if he will. His understanding has been enlightened spiritually, so that he may readily see the order and method of progress in the divine life. The law of advance is a plainly declared one. There is, if possible, less variation in the kingdom of grace than in that of nature. Definite results follow our efforts in established sequence. There is a positive security of attainment proportioned to our use of the means placed at our disposal.

Among the body of Christ's people we often find a great mistake on this point. We are too apt to look upon high attainments in the divine life, as the privilege of only a favoured few. But he that is admitted into this grace, is admitted to the full liberty of the children of God. There may not be always the same exhibition of Christian power before the world. Circumstances may render some more prominent than others. But the materials for an inward growth in grace are so available by all, as to leave us without excuse, if we are not active, earnest, and successful in our progress. If we are Christ's, Christ is ours, and our title to all the benefits which flow from redemption, is not an empty or theoretical one. The given Spirit is the divine pledge that high attainments are practicable. It is the duty and the privilege of all to press toward the mark

for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. There is no short by-path by which some Christians advance in personal holiness more rapidly than others. The road is to all the strait and narrow path, and the Holy Ghost in the heart, the risen Christ at the throne, and God with us are our helpers by the way. Each effort has its corresponding reward. Each prayer is answered according to the measure of faith. The five talents used are sure of gaining five more; but if three of them are hid away in a napkin, the other two will not make up the loss. We must be diligent in the use of means. There must be a perseverance of saints here on earth, and we may reckon with certainty upon the reward. There is no exclusive favouritism toward individual believers, but upon ourselves is thrown the responsibility of Christian attainment. Accordingly as we use the means, we receive the gracious effects.

The teachings of experience sustain this statement, and religious biography is especially interesting and instructive on this point. With all the allowance that can be claimed for different dispositions and temperaments, we can still see adequate results from the conscientious and efficient employment of the materials for expansion. In fact some of the noblest triumphs of grace, and the brightest ornaments of our faith, have been in those whose natural bias was unfriendly to everything amiable and Christ-like. They who have made advance in grace, have been men of like passions with ourselves. If we will be of like faith and earnestness, devotion and prayer, we shall be like them in progress.

They who have followed Bunyan as himself a Christian Pilgrim, must have beheld his advance in grace, by the very means he portrays to others. Baxter's Life and Works show him as attaining heights of grace only by earnest prayer and

heavenly contemplations. Doddridge shows so plainly the method of his sweet, heartfelt experience, that another eminent saint says of him, that his growth in grace was the result of a "business-like" devotedness. Whitefield at times spent hours "prostrate on the ground in silent and vocal prayer." Payson with rigid self-denial fasted, and prayed, and gave. If you will peruse the lives of Taylor, and McCheyne, of Alexander, and the host of others eminent for their graces, you will perceive the *modus operandi* of their triumphs, while you admire the holy grandeur of their lives. You will find that the secret of their high Christian attainments was not a secret after all; that frail mortals like ourselves, they struggled against indwelling sin, overcame the corruption of humanity by God's own appointed ways, and using the means placed in the power of every converted heart, they triumphed over sin, the world, and the flesh, and then went to receive the crown. The noblest lesson we can learn from their lives is, how sure and steady will be the result, if we only employ the appointed means. They lived close to the cross. They sought and found, prayed and believed, laboured and loved, fed and grew, until, mature in grace, they ripened into glory.

Why then shall not we all strive by the same methods for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord? Why shall not we too apply the laws sure to bring about moral results, and in expectant faith look for and receive the benefits? Why shall not we too so run that we may obtain? Oh! let us not pass life in wishing, but in acting. Why stop with mediocrity in grace? "He is happy," said the excellent Bishop Hall, "who in spiritual things is ever graciously ambitious."

Even with those who use some of the means of growth in

grace, the great defect is that they neglect others. They apply the law to a few cases, but do not accept and act upon it in its universality. It is not enough to develope one muscle of the physical frame, or to exercise one function of the mind. Nor is it sufficient to use one or two of the soul-expanding faculties. Symmetrical growth requires an outdrawing of every part. There must be right faith, right praying, right working, right living, right giving. Each has its harvest which turns into food, and our spiritual bodies need the variety. If each does not bear fruit, one of the principles of healthy vitality is wanting. I have known Christians faithful in one point, yet sadly lagging from a neglect of another. We must apply this law of growth to the whole redeemed nature, and connect it with the details of our daily life. The grand harmony of holiness is like that from an organ, not obtained by striking one key be it ever so grand. Each note is to be touched and it will give no uncertain sound. The result will be the melody of earnest piety. Oh! then, dear Christian, let us be encouraged. "Therefore so run we not as uncertainly, so strive we not as those that beat the air." The grace is sufficient, the abundance thine, and the laws of appropriation plain and definite. Use every part of the method, and "Ye always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work."

V. THE EFFECT OF SUCH GROWTH IN GRACE IS LASTING, SO
THAT GRACE HAS A CUMULATIVE POWER.

We reap abundant advantage from that already attained, and yet there is abundant room for new supply. The acquired grace of the past is not packed away merely to add to the storehouse, but at once becomes itself a vital, growing power. There

is thus not only addition, but multiplication of advantage. Real growth in grace, so far from being an exhaustive process, is a constant attainment of renewed means, strength, and vigor of growth. The legitimate crop of grace is twofold; more grace, and more means of growth in grace. The two are inseparably connected, and we thus have a constant re-duplication of force.

When a medicine collects in the system, and all at once exhibits its peculiar effects, it is said to be a cumulative remedy. But grace does even more than this. It is both immediate and cumulative in its action. A triumph over one sin is not only glorious in itself, but is the guaranty of future and more glowing successes. Conscience and will have gained an accessory, and the Master giveth grace more abundantly. This tree of life bears many manner of fruits; that of each year, undecayed and undecaying, still remaining on the tree, and by reason thereof each successive crop is more luxuriant and abundant. There is no law of death in grace. Rooted and grounded in the soul by the Spirit of God, its force of growth is for an endless life. Why then should not the Christian grow? Why should not even the one talent gain another, and the two increase to four, and these to eight, until there is a rapid and ever repeating progress. How great the privilege of early dedicating ourselves to Christ, that we may arrive even on earth at heights of divine illumination! Even if at a late period we have begun the race, shall we not for this very reason buckle on the armour more vigorously, and run less wearily? The old age of grace is not to be attended with decay. We do not arrive at its meridian here. "The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Here is a fulness which does not admit of satiety, au

appetite which cannot cloy. "Yet there is room," not by the loss of former graces, but by increased capacity for appropriation and enjoyment. Let us make it the business of life to lay up this treasure, to accumulate this spiritual property. It will never take wings and fly away from us, but will expand and bless us with present and eternal peace.

VI. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE, BECAUSE WE CANNOT STAND STILL, AND OUGHT NOT TO GO BACK.

God may command the sun to stand still in Gibeon, or the moon in the valley of Ajalon; but never the converted soul to stand still in its race to glory. Like some assumed lines in mathematics, the stand-still point of the Christian is an imaginary one. Masterly inactivity is no part of the method of grace. There will be progression or retrogression, an uprising or backsliding; and who would covet the experience of the backslider? It is indeed the most uncomfortable position of a mortal being; a redeemed soul again wallowing in the mire of sin; conscience goading and the mind uneasy with now and then a flashing recognition of its guilt; poor after having been rich, uneasy after the peace of believing. Unrest is the condition of the backslider, and though his case be more hopeful than that of the unconverted man, it is apparently more deplorable. If a true disciple, he will not wander entirely and hopelessly away. But so much the more sad will be the wailing of his sorrow, when he returns. Peter once tried the sitting still; but how soon he went out and wept bitterly! There is another monument in Scripture for those who would stop without going backward; and that is Lot's wife. It is not safe to linger, or to halt on our way to heaven. The city

of destruction from which we have escaped is so terrible that we must be busy all our days in getting as far from it as we can ; or else, while we think merely to stop by the way, sin, like an under-current of the ocean, will carry us fearfully back. To halt is to retreat ; and to return, as return we must if we are Christ's, the saddest slow-march of the Christian soldier. If we would defend us from ourselves, we must be grace-growing. If we stop, the Spirit is grieved, and the sight of the cross obscured ; faith falters, and the hosts of sin besiege. He who attempts the standing posture in his Christian course, is to say the least an idler, and as such, cannot withstand the assaults of the tempter. Be ye up then and doing, that ye may not fall. Have your lamps trimmed and burning, that ye may be ready at the coming of the bridegroom. We must go on because we are never told to sit still or go back, but to "run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."

VII. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE, BECAUSE IT IS A
MATTER WHICH PERSONALLY CONCERNS US.

How shall I grow? is no foreign question, but a charity beginning at home. We have a right to regard it with a personal intensity as if we were the only ones in the universe concerned. There is no selfishness in desiring great things in grace. Its very increase begets that love which excludes selfishness. We cannot from it benefit ourselves, without being the better able to benefit others.

It comes to us as the vital question of our own immortal destiny. When we shall give account of our stewardship, it is each one for himself. We are to bring not only the given grace of conversion ; but as we have gone forth bearing precious

seed, we are to come again with rejoicing bringing our *sheaves* with us. He that commands us, "Go work in my vineyard," holds us individually accountable for our obedience and for fruit therefrom.

We are too apt to find defects in the growth of others, and too careless in seeking our own. Better that we covet earnestly the best gifts that we may thus help ourselves and them to attain new holiness. Let us never lose the point of our soul's welfare in vague generalizations. It is "I by myself, I" whose soul is concerned. Seeking for growth in grace is seeking to have in possession the great seal of pardon, so that when the judge comes, the proof will be there. All the dear interests of the soul for time and eternity are involved in our personal holiness, our personal advance in the divine life. We need for ourselves that gracious ambition which knows no sensual rivalry, but which is urged onward by desire to prove ourselves faithful servants of the Most High. We need to concentrate the subject upon ourselves, and then to be thrust onward in grace, growing with the zeal of those whose personal and eternal *all* is at stake.

VIII. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE, BECAUSE OUR FAITH CANNOT BE LIVELY WITHOUT IT.

Faith without works is dead, and works without growth in grace are dead also. Dead faith and dead works are brethren, and growth in grace never dwelleth with them. Faith is like an artery of the human system, through which flows the life-blood of our souls; but let our desire for more grace become dull, inactive, stationary, and like an unused vessel of the body, it will shrivel and lessen, until but a mere trace is left.

It is no longer a channel of life, a grace-duct to our souls ; but a contracted cord, a feeble string, perhaps almost a broken thread. Standing Christians stop the flow of grace, not by exhausting the fountain, but by closing its channels. It is only the grace-growing Christian that is the ever-faithful Christian. Nothing but active, advancing spirituality can make our faith " the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Abiding, living faith, and growth in grace, I know not how one can exist without the other ; I do know that if both exist, they will not be kept apart ; but promises become experiences, hopes realities, and earth itself a foretaste of Heaven.

Be assured faith is a worker. It has *subdued* kingdoms, *wrought* righteousness, *obtained* promises, *stopped* the mouths of lions, and *quenched* the violence of fire. It watches and works, it labours and endures, and never can abide with a sleeping disciple. Grace must be growing, if we would have that hope which is as an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.

IX. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE, BECAUSE WITHOUT IT
WE CANNOT HAVE THE BEST EVIDENCE OF OUR AC-
CEPTANCE WITH GOD.

It is not experience long past, upon which as Christians we should most uniformly rely. There are to all days of dark despondency and doubt, when it is pleasant to be able to look back upon past attainments, and bask beneath the sunshine of first love. But this, so far from being a main reliance, is only to encourage us to such present action as shall secure present evidence. It is saddening continually to have to recur

to a period long since past, for any proof of a change of heart. The goal is not at the beginning of the race. This is reversing the order of grace as well as of language. The merchant or artisan of experience finds in his present possessions, or his still active employ, the proof of a good success ; and so must the Christian. We need to go back to first love, not so much for evidence as for humiliation ; to keep before us the view we took of ourselves when first at the foot of the Cross, and to behold our everlasting Deliverer as he appeared unto us in the dawn of a mutual glory. Our experiences too along the path are to be remembered and reviewed. There are in each one's history certain seasons of special interest, events which have been sanctified to him, special mercies which have encouraged him, special spiritual enjoyments which have sustained him. But these are of practical account chiefly as they accelerate present progress, and are not to be relied upon as the best present evidence. If indeed we accustom ourselves to rely upon these, we cultivate one of the worst habits a Christian can encourage. We lull to sleep present proof and effort by past reliance ; and so the future has not *this present* to trust upon, but must also return to the same more distant past. Past hopes thus used are dangerous sedatives to growth in grace.

There are, alas ! too many professing Christians who, when asked a reason for the hope that is in them, can by just such a process, only refer to a time ten, twenty, or thirty years ago, as any ground of their acceptance with God. Better this than no hope at all ; but, *my brethren, these things ought not so to be*. He is a God near at hand, and not afar off. We ought not to compel ourselves to fly so far after the olive branch of our peace. The day of our espousals was the first proof of our affection, but was never meant to be the chief. Though in its

morning there burst upon us bright rays of Christ's glory, it was not the high-noon of *our* brightness but only the beginning of that light which should grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," was the language of a trembling suppliant in his first approach to the Saviour. It is too often that of those who are relying upon early vows, rather than a present experience. Plighted faith is good; living devotion is better. We should in due time have enough of the lineaments of our divine Exemplar, of our Father, and elder Brother, to know that we are of the family, without searching the birth record as our only reliance. We must seek a present evidence of our acceptance, derived not only from our hopeful conversion, but from the experience also of the more recent past. This we cannot have without growth in grace. Where there is progression in holiness, the very grace we had at first is constantly reproduced; and now that God giveth more grace, we are adding thereto, so that the first proof of acceptance is brought down to the present date, illustrated and demonstrated by the fulness of experience since.

It is the only satisfactory way to confirm our hopes and strengthen our graces. God often vouchsafes to us assurance of our acceptance; and it is made our duty to strive for it. We can only do this by seeking progress in holiness. We are to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and not to be content saying to ourselves, We have Abraham for our father. The fruit is the best proof that we belong to the chosen family of the redeemed. With too many, the evidence of acceptance in the Beloved is arrived at by mere *negations*. I do not break the commandments. I do not neglect the church. I am not dishonest. I do not commit wrong intentionally, and such like.

All this is well, but aim at better things ; seek to know by progress what you are and where you are. Be not negatively, but positively, a Christian ; in other words, grow. Not only bear not bad fruit, or no fruit, but an abundance of good fruit. Let your evidence be not passive, but active, operative, progressive, productive.

The very law of growth in grace entitles us to such evidence of acceptance, as nothing else does. It is thus only that we can add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. The increase is not that of a foreign principle, but of those very graces which secure salvation. It is not only a rehearsal, but a re-enactment of evidence to ourselves, the practical exemplification of the reality of our past experience. "The effect of righteousness," saith the Spirit by Isaiah, "is quietness and assurance for ever."

O Christian professor ! who would have a life without any sign of salvation save the hope first indulged ? Who would not see results and progress, more love, more earnestness, more faith, increasing fondness for private devotions, more humility, more self-denial, more labour for the salvation of others, more heavenly-mindedness. These and the like are growths in grace. Without them, how trembling must be our evidence ? With them, we shall often be able in humble thanksgiving to look within and above, and see the seal and the pledge.

Grow in grace, or as the inspired Peter commands, "*Sanctify* the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." Without this *actual* sanctification, we cannot expect any evidence of acceptance ;

with it we may have the *Spirit* itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

X. WE SHOULD GROW IN GRACE, BECAUSE THIS IS THE
GRAND METHOD OF SECURING THE WORLD'S CONVER-
SION

Individuals make up the church of Christ, and the spiritual state of each one has no unimportant bearing upon that of all. One member cannot suffer without the whole body suffering therewith; and one cannot prosper in grace, without others receiving a benefit. This would be true even of any earthly organization; but for two reasons it is eminently true of the Christian Church. The relation of its members is a more intimate and co-relative one than that of any human society; and above all God attaches to his faithful ones blessings out of all proportion to what we would consider commensurate, overflowing from the first recipient upon those around him.

In grand generalizations, we too often overlook our own individuality. We pray for the world, and the church, and the people of God, as if we were not an active and accountable part thereof. They who seek the conversion of the world, leaving themselves without any thing to do therewith, overturn the method of God. We must recognize ourselves, as under him personal powers, upon whom depends, somewhat as upon an appointed link in a mighty chain, the suspended accumulation of results.

The first great step a man ever takes towards the conversion of the world, is to become himself a Christian, and the next is to aim at a high standard of Christian excellence. If we are personally growing in grace, inwardly in true and intimate union with Christ, and outwardly letting our light

shine with the brightness of increasing holiness, we are lending efficient aid towards the evangelization of mankind. We thus have a walk and conversation in itself a power; and better than all, that favour which is a prevalence with God, the greatest pledge of an eventual and millennial triumph.

Upon individual piety and growth in holiness depend the power and efficiency of the church. God has so ordered that the church should be the grand instrumentality for the promulgation and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom. By his voice of command, he might bring a heathen nation to the cross, without the knowledge or intervention of a single one of his disciples. But such is not his mode of subduing the world unto himself. Christ's church and its members are the appointed representatives of Christianity in the world, and the instruments to be used for its development. This kingdom of grace moves onward with the spiritual upbuilding of his people. It is not the rule of Providence to convert sinners when surrounded by sleeping saints. The general method of grace is not in spite of the apathy of Christians, but rather in co-operation with their earnest prayer, and labour, and progress. God rather blesses their efforts than substitutes his own unaided strength in their place. Though he needs not our poor services, it is one of the appointed plans of his government that he requires us as co-workers in the grand designs for the salvation of men. Never will the conversion of the world be accelerated while the resources of the church are undeveloped, or the graces of her people stationary. Hence we have come, even from past experience, to speak of the outpouring of the Spirit, under all circumstances as a *Revival*, the very word denoting that Christians themselves awake from their lethargy and buckle on the armour of salvation. Those pastors,

and missionaries, and laymen, and churches, that have accomplished most, have ever been those most earnest in the attainment of personal holiness. To working, grace-growing Christians, sacred results, gracious visitations, and grand extensions of the kingdom of God, are the invariable sequence and reward.

When the church, that is, when each individual member is doing his duty, depending on divine assistance, and growing in grace, then it becomes a tree of life with outspreading branches, with living leaves, with abundant fruit—a tree for the healing of the nations.

Then God the Father, the Redeemer, the Holy Spirit is abroad in the earth, in the might of his merciful loving-kindness, clothing his people with salvation, and the world with his praise. Until then, never will the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, or the church militant be prepared to be the church triumphant.

The home lesson which the wants of the world should teach to every Christian heart is, "Grow in grace." Then our interest for others will increase, our graces flow forth as a river, and waves of influence take start within and from us, which shall roll on to the very day of millennial triumph. Better this than inflamed zeal, transient effort, or spasmodic interest; for it is a principle of divine power to christianize the nations.

God does use the labours, the money, the authority of men to advance his reign, just as he makes the wrath of men to praise him. But more precious than all, are the earnestness and prayers and grace-growth of individual souls. These are powers behind all secular machinery and nearest himself. With heart-religion abounding and increasing among professed disciples, the problem of the world's conversion is already in pro-

cess of solution ; and by thine own self-consecration thou canst give efficient support. This is thy first and most acceptable aid. Our personal faithfulness and spiritual growth—this is the offering he accepts, the force upon which he relies ; and with these consecrated in the Christian church, he will come to reign king of nations as he now does king of saints. If we will, we may do our part, and at last receive the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord ;" if not, through the spirituality of others, the work though delayed and impeded by us will go on, and we lingerers in the mighty marching hosts of the redeemed have reason to fear lest a promise being left us of entering into the rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. Grow in order to glorify God. Grow in order to be the happy Christian thyself ; and grow that the world may bloom with the beauties of holiness.

XI. THE BIBLE COMMANDS US TO GROW IN GRACE, AND THE SPIRIT HAS BEEN VOUCHSAFED TO US FOR THIS PURPOSE.

To the Christian this alone, without any arguments addressed to interests, feelings, or reason, is enough. The expressed word of direction is the signal which summons the Christian soldier to the line and place of duty ; and God always makes this the place of blessing.

Growth is everywhere recognized in Scripture as a part of our spiritual life. Never once on its sacred pages is the saint compared with commendation to anything stationary or lifeless. On the contrary, figures and similitudes are employed, which express most earnestly and vividly progress, expansion, and rapid increase.

The righteous is "like a tree," the noblest specimen of vege-

table life, "planted," in a favourable place, "by the rivers of water," a perennial evergreen bearing with abundant luxuriance.

"The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree ; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

Hosea represents the chosen ones as "growing like the lily and the vine ;" emblems of purity and fruitfulness.

The blessed promise and prophecy of Malachi is, "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings ; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."

The dispensation of the Gospel is introduced to us with multiplied elements of increase and enlargement. We are brought into the kingdom "as new-born babes, and are to desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby."

To the whole body of believers the command is, "Grow in grace."

We are to "grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ," "growing unto a holy temple in the Lord."

We are to "add to faith virtue, to virtue knowledge," and to be so fitly joined to Christ as to "increase with the increase of God."

Christ has chosen us that we should "go and bring forth fruit, and that our fruit should remain."

"We are to abound more and more."

"The path of the just is as the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

We are not to "receive the grace of God in vain," but to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

"It is a good thing that the heart be established in grace."

“This is the will of God even our sanctification.”

“*Building up ourselves* on the most holy faith, we are to keep ourselves in the love of God.”

It is by perfecting ourselves in the use of appointed means that “we are to come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

The description of the Christian profession as a race, a warfare, a life; in fact the whole tenor of the Gospel, by spirit and letter, by word and power, declare growth in grace to be the great business of our earthly pilgrimage. Time would fail us to recount the passages, narratives, and illustrations by which the lesson is conveyed. As a principle and a precept it glows upon the pages of inspiration, inculcating the practice, and energizing the life of increasing holiness.

The Holy Spirit too is a “Spirit of grace,” with its indwelling power, ever ready to “help our infirmities,” and give us life. Growth in grace is one of the promised fruits of the Spirit; and it is only by passing from one state of progress to another, that we can be “built up a spiritual house.”

With such an aid, it is ours to obey the command, and in so doing we shall secure the fulness of the blessing. Its height and breadth, its length and depth, we shall more joyfully know; and not as though we had already attained, either were already perfect; yet reaching forth unto those things which are before, we shall press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

XII. THE GRACE-GROWING CHRISTIAN IS ALONE THE HAPPY CHRISTIAN.

The atmosphere he breathes is constantly in a process of purification. His spiritual nature enjoys its true element. He

is living not only up to the duties, but up to the privileges of his profession. In him the Spirit is bearing the precious fruits of joy and love. He goes about his daily work, not as an obedient slave, but as a grateful follower. "Singing he carries his work before him." When actual sanctification is the work of the believer, he can rejoice as he advances. The little clouds and doubts and fears are exceptions, rather than the rule, and like summer showers render the succeeding sunshine more touching and appreciable. While he strives for heavenly heights, it is not the restless ambition of this world, but the restful zeal of godliness. To him Christianity becomes the life which is by faith upon the Son of God, and when asked a reason of the hope that is in him, he is able meekly to give one from present or recent experience. Even for the evidence of our piety, the sweet assurance of our acceptance, and the comfort it imparts in this world, it is worth our while to grow in grace; and oh! how much more so for the rich prospect it brightens before us.

We will not debate the question whether a Christian who never increases in holiness will at last receive the crown. But he who is willing to risk his hopes on such a low standard, seems too near the bottomless pit.

The happy Christian rises to nobler heights, and in grace-growing efforts and disposition, lays hold upon the joys set before him in the Gospel. Who ever saw a Christian happy with the comforts of holiness, for years living without any perceptible advance in grace? The very suggestion involves such a confusion of terms and ideas, as to render the language of such an inquiry contradictory. It is only by seeking growth in grace, that we can know the real luxury of religion. This it is to enjoy religion.

Our piety thus becomes not only the fulfilment of a vow, or the adoption of a system ; but the enjoyment of a practical, robust, life of the soul. It is thus that the redeemed of the Lord are to walk ; and the promise is that they shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

It were easy to continue the enumeration of reasons why the Christian should—may we not say?—*must* grow in grace. But enough we hope has been said to lead us all, trusting in God, to resolve to aim more earnestly at this high mark of spiritual life. Oh ! that each one of us may now personally re-consecrate ourselves to our Redeemer, and seeking divine illumination, make it the chief end of our lives to glorify God, that we may enjoy him for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

PRE-REQUISITES TO GROWTH IN GRACE.

HAVING viewed grace in its essence, and growth in grace in its propriety and necessity, it behooves us now to consider some of the more general pre-requisites to this spiritual advancement.

The one which most obviously presents itself to every mind is that of *Conversion*.

So long as the heart is at enmity with God, and the evil of sin has not been fully recognized, so long as the method of salvation by Christ has not been appreciated or accepted, we cannot speak of divine favour as attained. We must secure this grace of Conversion, before we can set about the great work of Christian growth. This the saint professes to have experienced ; but it is all important that we should have within and about us the evidences of a true change of heart.

There are two prominent modes by which this change may in its more general outlines be tested ; the one, our experience at the time of conviction and presumed conversion ; the other, the commentary which subsequent life has afforded thereupon. If we have seen the sinfulness of our hearts, and Christ as our only refuge, and with an entire reliance upon him, have by faith accepted the proffered pardon, we have some reason for a hope which maketh not ashamed. But so deceitful is the

human heart, that we need besides this consciousness of a radical change in our feelings, emotions, and desires, the testimony also of our subsequent life. If the same views are still sustained, and if they have resulted in renewed self-consecration to Christ, we have still further evidence that the good seed was sown in good and honest hearts, and that the germ of the Spirit is in it. If any doubt still lingers in the mind, effective growth in grace is the armour in which to beseige the doubting castle. This will put it to the test.

The presence of this grand pre-requisite can best be proved by resort to means promotive of spiritual growth. If our change has not been real, private duties will soon become formal or irksome, spirituality tasteless, self-denial laborious, and the very attempt at progress in holiness, will either lead us to a sense of hypocrisy or self-deception ; or if we are true disciples will so show us to ourselves, as to teach us our dependence, and lead us to labour earnestly, and to seek divine assistance in the work.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELLING WITH- IN US, IS A PRE-REQUISITE TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

It is not enough that we have *once* been under the influence of the Holy Ghost ; that it has striven with us, and we have been conscious of unusual religious impressions. If God *ever withdraws his Spirit* from his people, it is in punishment of their unfaithfulness. Even Christians are sometimes disposed to cloak their coldness under false pretenses. Never, never let the professed followers of Christ give as an excuse for coldness, the absence of the Spirit. This is their condemnation, and their apathy the sad result. If the Comforter is gone, it is

because thou hast driven him away. If once thou hast become a Christian, he came to abide with thee ; not as a travelling sojourner, but as having a dwelling-place, a residence, in thy heart. This Holy Spirit is like breath, like the air, indispensable to Christian vitality. It is not as one of the recurring seasons, or a sunshine, to be succeeded by dark skies and wintry storms ; but a pure ever-pervading presence ; to assist in the duties of life, to protect from the assaults of the adversary, and in every temptation to provide a way of escape. Surely we cannot grow in grace without it. There are times when in answer to prayer or in God's merciful view of our necessity, amidst temptations especially besetting, or trials eminently severe, it is given more abundantly. But it is to be at all times, a present, potent aid, not coming only on emergencies, since without it every hour would be an emergency ; but a constant, indwelling helper of our infirmities. " Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God." Yet this Spirit may be grieved by the professed follower of Christ. Hence Paul besought the Ephesians, that they " grieve not the Spirit of God ;" and the plaintive prayer of David in the abasement of his penitential psalm is, " Take not thy Holy Spirit from me."

The true Christian cannot too frequently contemplate the permanent relation of the Spirit to himself. Just as the body without the soul is dead, so the Christian without the Spirit is dead also. Just as you may starve the body, so that the soul will leave it, so you may starve the spiritual nature until all Christian activity is driven away. This starvation system is entirely conducted by ourselves. Our own free will, and not the will of God, is the active agent. After becoming Christians, we do not have to go as strangers after the Spirit to pre-

vent its absence, but actually have to resist it, and drive it from us, in order not to advance. But if we have it not, if we rid ourselves of this aid as a present abiding comforter, we will not grow in grace. If we will only cherish it, it shall be given more abundantly, and growth will furnish in itself new evidence of its power.

We have then as much to do with the strengthening and maintaining of this pre-requisite of grace-growing as we have with obtaining our daily bread. If we are Christ's, he is ours by this ever present, aiding Spirit, and we through it are co-workers with God in building up the temple of holiness within us.

III. OUR FAITH MUST ALSO BE SETTLED AND CONFIRMED IN ITS CHIEF LINEAMENTS, IF WE WOULD GROW IN GRACE.

There must be an established conviction of the reality and security of our reliance. The very name of "believer," if appropriate, is the pledge of an abiding trust.

Unbelief is not only the plague spot on the sinner, but a dreaded and fearful thing to the Christian.

Said Sir Humphry Davy in his "Last days of a Philosopher,"

"I envy no quality of the mind or intellect in others; not genius, power, wit, or fancy, but if I could choose what would be most delightful and, I believe, most useful to me, I should prefer a firm religious belief to every other blessing;—for it makes life a discipline of goodness, creates new hopes when all earthly hopes vanish, throws over the decay and destruction of existence, the most gorgeous of all lights, and gives the security of everlasting joys, where the sensualist and the sceptic view only gloom, decay, annihilation, or despair." If this

is true as a philosophic conclusion, it is still more sublimely true as a Christian experience. Without it growth in grace must be unsteady, uncertain, unsatisfactory. It is the channel through which, like a river, flows out our portion of the grace of God ; but if all along there are huge outlets, or waste-gates of doubt, only a little rill may reach us. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." "Let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord." Faith is no how a doubter. Its definition is the most precise in all Scripture. It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

"Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." We do not claim that there must always be the same fulness of faith ; for it is to increase with the advance of spiritual life. But there must be from the first a good hope through grace. Though only a child as yet, there must be the true bone and sinew and muscle—the grand outlines, in order that growth may fill out the body of our faith.

With the Christian, it must not be a mere emotion or feeling ; but an abiding principle. He should thoroughly examine its nature and foundation, by the Word of God, by the Spirit, and by the help of reason, so far as it can follow ; and having definitely settled it in his mind, "not laying again the foundation of faith toward God," he is "to go on unto perfection." It is a part of the ground-work, not the superstructure—a pre-requisite, before it can be a direct means of growth. "Our faith is to be as an anchor to the soul sure and steadfast. If the Christian finds himself unsteady in his belief, as to himself, or his relations to God, it is at once his business and duty to set about the work of examination. He must at once face the question, for it is vital, and with prayer and the Spirit, his

Bible and his reason, together with the explanations of those more confirmed and established in the faith, he will not fail to find a sure reliance. We sometimes err in thrusting aside doubts that have repeatedly beset us, rather than firmly and valiantly meeting them. Surely we must never indulge in carping criticism and doubtful disputation, or receive the assaults of unbelief in a spirit of controversy. But it is often best in Christian docility, yet firmness, to meet apparent difficulties, and work on 'until we subdue them. "There are," says Sir Thomas Brown, "as in Philosophy, so in Divinity, sturdy doubts and boisterous objections wherewith the unhappiness of our knowledge too nearly acquainteth us. More of these no man hath known than myself, which I confess I conquered not in a martial posture, but on my knees." With such a spirit we may not fear to use the aids of reason and experience ; and a confirmed faith is the sure trophy of our victory. Never let the Christian rest with a habitually shaking faith. Meet the hostilities of the enemy with the sword of the Spirit ; when prevailing, write down the mode and record of thy triumph with thy pen, and in thy heart ; and then be not carried about "with every wind of doctrine." Without this we are too open to attack—we cannot grow in grace as we should. With it, we have the breast-plate of faith, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation ; and then we shall go on increasing in faith ; stewards of the *manifold* grace of God, abounding in the work of the Lord.

IV. IN ORDER TO GROWTH IN GRACE, WE MUST HAVE A LIVELY SENSE OF THE INTENSE WICKEDNESS OF SIN, AND OF OUR OWN PERSONAL GUILT AND UNWORTHINESS BEFORE GOD.

“The first step toward repentance is a sense of its necessity.” The first hard thing for a man to do, if he would prepare for heaven, is to see how wicked it is to be a sinner; and this too is one of the most difficult things for the Christian to remember. Even with our renewed natures, how prone we are to apologize for sin, to forget its enormity, to depreciate its fragrance! We must cultivate a lively and abiding sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin—of our sins after salvation, as well as before. In the ordinary forms of prayer we usually confess our sins in general, but do we behold them in their individual deformity? Do we feel what a sinner is—what we were as unpardoned sinners, and what we do now when we sin? Do we not even yet catch ourselves palliating our guilt, instead of, as now in the light of God’s countenance, magnifying its hideous grossness? We must see our every sin as a rebellion against God’s authority. We must behold ourselves as daily dependents on his mercy, and see the unreasonableness, the ingratitude of sin, made more flagrant by our hope of redemption. God hates sin not less in his people, than in those who are not his. On this account some of the severest punishments recorded in Holy Writ were pronounced upon his own beloved, chosen ones. Moses was a man of God, the chosen leader of his people Israel, one for whom he had a special regard; and yet when he sinned the anger of the Lord was kindled against him. “He met him in the way and sought to kill him.” We cannot keep before the renewed heart a too vivid

picture of the sinfulness of sin. We must measure it by *its nature*, its *author*, its *sad effects*, by the *character of the law*, and the *authority* against which it was rebellion, and by the *ransom it cost*. We need by constant examination to keep our sensibilities alive on these points. Guilt is really more odious in the Christian than in the unconverted sinner. Its contrast with the beamings of grace makes it the more awful; and this new brightness reveals hidden enormities unseen in the twilight. How constant and earnest should the prayer of the saint be, Oh ! deliver me from the body of this death ! When led into sin, how we should abhor ourselves in dust and ashes !

It is a sad error with many, that they content themselves with having, as they believe, once seen the enormity of sin. But there is no more important pre-requisite to growth in grace, than to have this abiding conviction in reference to it. Such a humility should be the daily starting-point of renewed hopes and renewed desires. Though repentance be the vestibule to the court of heaven—the outer gate of the temple about which are the sad tokens of the disorder and confusion sin has wrought, yet we must keep this ever in view, if we would appreciate our redemption, and sing with zeal the new song of our deliverance. When appeals are addressed to the unconverted, their sins set before them, and the declarations of God's word in respect to them enforced, how apt are we to feel that these are not applicable to us ! We are the people of God—a comfort, it is true, but take it not as a cloak. All that is said of sin thou thyself needest to realize ; for from such a pit hast thou been delivered ; and besides, thou art not yet perfect, but still dost daily transgress in thought, word, and deed. Thou needest still personally to feel the loathsomeness of transgressions. “ Just as all worship breaks down if it is not based on the feelings due from

a creature to his Creator ; just as all conversions come to nothing, which are not conversions from sin ; just as all penances are unavailing which do not rest on Christ ; just as all good works crumble away which do not rest upon our Saviour ; so all holiness has lost its principle of growth if it is separated from *abiding sorrow* for sin."

The believer has helps in this matter, which render the search more easy, and the guilt more palpable. It is a great trouble to the anxious inquirer that he cannot see his sins ; but we have learned the way through this valley of humiliation, with the Good Shepherd and Saviour as our guide. We have caught glimpses from the light above and beyond ; and with affections and desires trained by religious experience, we are better able to detect the fallacies by which Satan obscures the enormity of sin.

Some find excuse that they were born sinners. But the Christian has seen that God placed man under the most favourable circumstances, when he chose for him a representative made in his own image, the most perfect that could exist, and placed him in a paradise where he was surrounded by every inducement to holiness. Then a second representative is vouchsafed, and sin grows more sadly sinful, as we see how men reject a *Saviour*, able if *they will* to overcome all the ruin of the fall ; and yet even we, who have tasted and seen the Lord still gracious, with a Redeemer, a Mediator, an Advocate, still disobey. The very mercy we have received ought to exhibit before us sin in the intensity of its evil. Brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ, we should see it as that abominable thing which he hates, and which his people must hate. In such a light our own sins which others may call little, will appear to us great. We should not be content with general

acknowledgments; but search out particular crimes, recognize darling sins, and watch especially against them, and see to it, that none hide away from the inspection of our own consciences. These Achans must be thrust out from our own spiritual camp. One darling sin with its real enormity unrecognized, has kept many a Christian grovelling.

Our whole experience should lead us not only to detest sin in the abstract, but to perceive our own guilt and unworthiness. Such is the duty of the zealous saint, no less than that of the troubled sinner. With settled conviction, and tender recognition of its true character we have an important pre-requisite to growth in holiness. Without them our gratitude must be feeble, our love cold, our advancement irregular, and the beauty of piety obscured.

It might seem a sadness, rather than a privilege, thus to be compelled to insist upon this low and abiding view of ourselves as sinners, were it not the best preparative to another pre-requisite to growth in grace, which we now proceed to notice.

V. WE MUST HAVE A CONSTANT SENSE OF THE INFINITE MERIT AND LOVE OF CHRIST FOR US, AND OF THE COMPLETENESS OF HIS PLAN OF SALVATION.

By its holy magnificence, the very loathsomeness of sin becomes the occasion of delight; and man made lower, ascends with a new song, higher than the angels.

The love of Christ is one of the strongest motives for growth in grace, that addresses itself to the Christian heart. Were there no other argument for progress in holiness, this should constrain us. We must have an abiding appreciation of the

love of Christ, in order to march joyfully on in the path to heaven. It is the life of the renewed soul. We need repeatedly to contemplate what it was for Christ to die for *me*, for rebels, and enemies whose loss the God of the universe could easily bear, for those who were but as one mote on the sunbeams of his inextinguishable glory, and whose absence from him, so far as his own majesty and power were concerned, was less than the annihilation of an atom. Yet with this unmerited, disinterested love we are redeemed, and not easily redeemed; for humiliation and agony were its willing price, amidst the scorn and buffetings of those whom he came to deliver. If ever there was a transcendent theme for continuous contemplation, we have it here. And yet alas! how prone are we to forget, or to feebly feel it? We grow enthusiastic in the admiration of a frail woman, who will watch at the sick soldier's bed-side, and soothe the pains and groans of the dying; we talk of elevated humanity, and sublime devotion, when we behold a wife clinging with love-lit tenacity to a husband whom disease and misfortune have manacled; and we weep over the sympathy which mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, all show for those to whom they are attached. But how coldly we view the sympathy of Jesus, a compassion proven by self-sacrifice, a sympathy of which all these are but the faintest reflections!

Even by comparing human government with divine, we may apprehend something of the merit of this plan of salvation. We do not call him a tyrannical ruler who punishes those offending against the plain law of the statute-book. We even complain if the sceptre is too often held out for the rescue. Yet so far is divine law above human, and the majesty of its justice above us, that the enormity of the transgression is multiplied to infinity; and yet God is the only governor, who

ever did devise a plan by which all the rebels and the criminals could be pardoned, and the power, stability, and efficiency of the law be maintained. "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Shall such love and condescension be ever forgotten? Shall it ever be viewed lukewarmly? Should it not be the beating heart, the bounding pulse of our spiritual life? Can we expect to grow in grace without this circulating *as a permanent idea in all our religious efforts*? And then consider how great the exaltation thus secured. It is said of oceans that their beds are hollowed out to a depth as great as the height of mountains. But the glory of our elevation is greater even than the depth of the degradation. It is death's corruption replaced by life's immortality, sin's withering form, by the beauty of holiness, defiled garments by robes clean and white, an infinite Hell by an infinite Heaven.

It is one of the subtle arts of the tempter to lead even the Christian at times to undervalue and depreciate this love; to admit perhaps that such a gift was kind, but yet to excuse the enormity of sin, and suggest that some more easy method might have been devised; to set us to theorizing; to bring it down to the level of human loving-kindness; to cast in the background the true relation of man and God, without Christ; and to push justice out of sight, only in order that mercy too may be more easily decried. It is best at once in earnest inquiry with prayer, to meet the illusive crisis; for this love will bear intense examination. Rigid reason will come to the aid of revelation, in unfolding it, and experience with her six thousand years of trial cannot find the semblance of a parallel. Search the biography of the Bible, and all the history of centuries since, and the only approach thereto, little as it is, has

been with those most imbued with an appreciation of it. They who have best contemplated and illustrated it, have magnified its ineffable glory, and beyond all things else, desired to "be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge *that they might be filled with all the fulness of God.*" Ah! this is a glorious pre-requisite to this fulness. Growing in grace, we shall also grow in our appreciation of this love. O Lord, grant that with an abiding sense of the sinfulness of *sin in us*, we may also have that constant view of the perfect love of Christ, which casteth out fear, and thus have the pervading, indwelling essence of progressive holiness.

VI. A SEARCH AFTER EASILY BESETTING SINS, AND A DESIRE TO RECOGNIZE AND OVERCOME THEM, IS ANOTHER PRE-REQUISITE TO ADVANCEMENT.

It should, from the time of conversion, ever be our settled determination, not to hide our iniquities from us, but to bring them all to the test of this new light, in order that they may be reprov'd. The command is, "watch and pray." We must be ever watchful, if we would avail ourselves of the means of grace. A searching circumspection must be the habit of our daily spiritual life. We are to recognize a constant conflict between the flesh and the spirit, and to have it as our firm principle ever to be on the alert to overcome the wicked one. To do this, we must acquire the habit of looking after those sins which do so easily beset us, that we may know what shafts and arrows are especially directed against us, and at what points we are especially vulnerable.

There are four temptations so prominent, so easily besetting, that all may with propriety single them out for special watchfulness. These are : Pride, as opposed to humility ; Selfishness, as opposed to self-denial ; The spirit of Resentment, as opposed to forgiveness ; Worldliness as opposed to spirituality.

Pride is the darling sin of Satan, to which he clings with the tenacity of a first-love, and which, in its multiplied forms, he would wrap closest about the human soul.

To a world it can be said in the language of the prophet, "The pride of thy heart deceived thee," and the counsel of Jeremiah to the chosen Israel, "Weep in secret for your pride," still needs to be sounded in *our* ears. It not only keeps multitudes out of the Christian church, but often unsuspectedly prevents, among believers, a progressive holiness. It is to the humble he giveth grace, James iv. 6. "Whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted," Matt. xviii. 4. "Be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble," 1 Pet. v. 6. "Walk humbly with thy God," Mic. vi. 8. "Let the mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. ii. 5 and 8.

Before growth in grace, "before honour is humility." Pride among Christians soon begets formality, and makes the very disciples of Christ contend which shall be the greatest. It often checks the kind attention to the poor and despised among men, prevents the faithful word of exhortation or entreaty, and in the house of professed friends wounds the earnest for himself and God. Ambitious and exalting itself in everything else, in piety it whispers moderation, and with

siren songs, commends the middle walks of Christianity. It assumes so many phases, that it must be watched in order to be detected and overcome.

Selfishness is often the sad accompaniment of pride, and sometimes itself the prominent obstacle to our growth in holiness. The Gospel which bids us love our neighbours as ourselves is so opposed to such a *spirit* that it must be completely subsidized to grace, in order that our works may be meet for repentance. The signal of our faith is the cross, and self-denial is written thereupon in characters "of living light," and dying glory too. A willingness to forego present self-gratification for the sake of others, of duty, of God, is the prominent feature of the Gospel plan. The voice that speaks to us salvation, cries, "If any will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." If we are true disciples, we will not be afraid to have our religion cost us something. Christ taught his followers when with them on earth to expect crosses, and he would have us to do the same. It is easy to appear to serve God, when religion is popular, and everything moves smoothly; but we need to test our sincerity and endurance by acts of self-denial. In our own land, amidst the freedom of religious institutions, we are really in danger as Christians of suffering for want of trial. But we are to deny ourselves. We must not be always studying convenience in religion. Self-denial does not always involve suffering or persecution; but whether it does or not, it needs to be impressed upon our hearts that we are to exercise it, and to seek occasions for its exercise.

The only kind of selfishness for the Christian is to covet earnestly the best gifts, that in thus obtaining blessings for his own soul, he may be the better able to take up the cross and follow Jesus, who went about doing good.

The spirit of resentment is another of the most universally besetting sins ; not perhaps with the Christian often exhibiting itself in outspoken words, or overt acts ; but rankling in the heart, destroying Christian fellowship, disturbing peace of mind, and obtruding itself into the dwelling-places of charity. If nourished the least, it grows as if by spontaneous generation, and soon will eat out the quietness and joyfulness of a forgiving spirit.

The last prayer of a dying Saviour in his last great agony, " Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," and that of the martyr Stephen, " Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," breathe so much of love and pardon, that we need no other argument. The Christian has a reason for forgiving that others have not ; for how much more has he been forgiven than he can forgive ? The most we are taught to ask is, " Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." We have been forgiven by the King ten thousand talents ; why should we not forgive our fellow-servant an hundred pence ? Matt. xviii. 23. This spirit does not require that we wink at sin, or tamely submit to the enemies of Christ. But it does require that in opposing wrong, we hate the sin, not the sinner ; and especially that malice and envy, jealousy and revenge never dwell within us. Our religion is the only one that has ever taught the rendering of good for evil ; and we ought to illustrate this its incomparable grandeur by our example. So full is the human heart of the spirit of revenge, that we need ever to recognize the tendency, in order that we may counteract it by the means of grace.

Worldliness, as opposed to spirituality, is no less than the other three a besetting enemy to almost every professing disciple in his strivings for growth. " Ye cannot serve God and

mammon." In every age of the church it has been the mighty opposer to heart-religion, and in no age more than our own. Wealth, with its gilded offerings, is its most shining bait. Experience erects funereal piles of evidence that "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition"; "for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after they have been seduced from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." For the few whom gold will not attract, the world has still other allurements. Fashion and fame, lineage and popularity, have each their votaries; while to others the love of children and friends take the place where the love of God should reign supreme. Unless faith be active and earnest, present things affect the senses more than those which are to come. For the transitory joys of the earth, even the Christian barter away too many of the pleasures and pursuits of holiness. It will not do to have any other gods before Him, if we would have our Saviour evidently set forth.

The friendship of the world is enmity with God. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

The great reason why most Christians advance so slowly, is because they set too high an estimate on the things of this world. They forget that to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Indulging the flesh with worldly enjoyments, they starve the soul of spiritual delights. They put burdens grievous to be borne upon their shoulders. There is a way in which attention to worldly em-

ployments is even favourable to our spiritual advancement ; but this must be a part of religion, not a substitute for it. The ambitions of this life must have conjoined with them ambition in holiness. In our very business we must recognize God and his directing providence, and look to him as the author of our every blessing. We must be able to feel ourselves servants of the Most High in the workshop or in the counting-room, in the profession or upon the farm. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we must do all to the glory of God. This is the only way we can gain the victory over this besetting sin, which drowns so many souls in perdition.

There is no more deceitful argument against spirituality, than that which Satan suggests, derived from our worldly wants. Oh ! how many with imagined necessity clog themselves with unnecessary cares ; and then excuse neglect of duty on the plea of wanting leisure time. Stop ! O Christian ! Who giveth thee thy time ? If vouchsafed unto thee, is there anything that ought to interfere with progress in holiness ? Does not God claim our primary attention to our spiritual natures ? and will any self-imposed business engagements satisfy his demands ?

The class that offer this apology, are generally not those to whom, even in a worldly view, it would apply. Those with their thousands often urge the reason with the same apparent and blindly-felt necessity, as others striving for a limited supply. We too often forget that God presides over temporal prosperity, as well as over moral providence, and all he requires of us, is such a diligent use of means as will not interfere with spiritual duty. The faith of a Christian may implicitly trust him for the remainder ; nay, must. Industry and frugality are moral virtues, God-appointed instruments, but when they de-

generate into worldliness, and are framed into excuses for spiritual idleness, neglect of duty, and lethargy in grace, they are stamped with the dye of sin.

Experience even in a worldly sense teaches touching lessons on this point. Riches and honours take to themselves wings and fly away. If retained, they do not afford perfect peace. If left for our posterity, often they are their ruin; and so by numberless examples, prove this plea of necessary worldliness a miserable deception. How beautiful in contrast he, who with commendable zeal, pursues his daily duties; not neglecting his spiritual wants, striving properly for his daily bread, yet trusting to the daily petition his Lord has taught his disciples; an actual thriving Christian, no less than an active man, having ever the faith which was the experience of the Psalmist, "I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

The fallacy, no less than the infidelity of the excuse, is still further illustrated by the lives of many who, if any, might claim release from the claims of earnest spirituality on the ground of their pressing occupations. Hale and Boerhaave, Gardiner and Page, Havelock and Vicars, and a host of others, distinguished in science and arts, in commerce and arms, have found time for God's service, and yet been earnest and successful in their secular vocations. In religion more reasonably than in anything else, "where there is a will there is a way." God himself arranges for us, and makes furloughs for the retirements and spiritualities of religion, consistent with our prosperous attention to the concerns of daily life. Let the Christian worldling—strange term! and yet so much a paradox is man that in religious themes we must sometimes use strange contradictions—let the worldly Christian be careful not to

use what constitutes his guilt, as the excuse for his want of spiritual progress ;—not to deceive himself with arguments and pleas, which may leave him speechless before the Judge, at the last great trial day.

Beside these four prominent besetting sins, which, from their universality may be singled out for special guard, there are manifold others peculiar to each individual heart.

Temperaments, dispositions, localities, inclinations, inducements, exposures, circumstances, in all their multiplied forms, are to be studied and recognized by each one for himself, in order that the world may not triumph. There are secret sins, which none but God and self can see, private besetments which none but the tempter, the tempted, and his Comforter may know. Of most of these the world is the grand engine ; and hence its power must be understood.

As a pre-requisite to growth in grace, or to the use of the means of grace, there must be this fixed determination to search out and overcome them all. Others we have not more fully noticed, because the point just now is to settle the question of conflict, to confirm the resolve and tenacity of opposition, rather than to compass the modes of attack and procedure.

But there must be on the part of the believer, this settled determination to know himself in his weaknesses, if he would know God in the strength of his might. There must be a close surveillance of sin and temptation, if we would be fully equipped with the means the God of grace has placed in our power. The very joints of the harness must be proven. We must not lull ourselves into a false security with the idea that having once repented, we are safe ; but must follow up the grand triumphs with such continued faithfulness, as shall secure

the choicest fruits of victory. The in-dwellings of sin are not yet so completely purified, but that other legions will assail. With the Spirit to aid, O glorious encouragement, we must be willing watchmen at the citadels of our own hearts, lest the world come in like a flood to overwhelm us. Our self-imposed duty now, is to be on guard ; to recognize our sins of omission and commission, and not to cloak or disemble them before ourselves, as we cannot before God. Thus we shall be true to our conversion, and to our vows, and favourably enter upon the use and enjoyment of the means of grace.

VII. AS ANOTHER NECESSITY IN ORDER TO SECURE SPIRITUAL PROGRESS, WE MUST DEFINITELY AND DECISIVELY MAKE UP OUR MINDS, THAT TO GROW IN GRACE IS THE CHRISTIAN'S GREAT BUSINESS.

It is a rule in religion, as in everything else, that whatever we do not consider important, we will not pursue with zeal. Hence it is indispensable, that after conversion we should fully feel our relations to our own spiritual natures and progress. We need definitely to settle in our minds, not only the obligations of conduct, but of action ; what there is for us to *do*. It must be impressed upon us, not as a spasmodic earnestness, but as an integral part of our spiritual life, that our chief business is to grow in grace. We are in a systematic, life-devoted spirit to enter upon our work. Lethargy in our soul's concerns is less pardonable than in anything else ; for it is the too significant token of a want of interest and devotedness, a sad contradiction to our whole previous confessions. Habitual or even frequent lassitude is out of all character for the Christian. "If religion is anything, it is everything." Indolence

now is high-handed insolence to Him under whose banner we have enlisted. How to grow in grace has by a vital necessity become a life-question. The industry of sanctified reason is to be on the alert to secure and accelerate spiritual advancement. The power of knowledge is to be directed to our spiritual illumination; the emotions are to be cultivated and the passions to be controlled, to this end; the conscience is to be informed, the Spirit to be sought by appointed instrumentalities, and we with all our powers to be intent upon this business of grace-culture. The same devoted earnestness, diligence, order, and capability directed to spiritual as to temporal concerns, will secure proportionate and glowing results.

There is among the people of God a want of definite views as to the sense in which it is "our personal business" to increase in holiness. Some go about the *work of building themselves up in the faith* so as almost to cast aside the idea of dependence upon God. Though they have not, like the unregenerate, trusted to their own works for salvation, they seem to rely upon them for their growth in grace. There is at least a commendable industry and recognition of the importance of personal effort on the part of this class; and for this very reason there is the more hope that they will detect their error. Such need to continue working, but to be careful ever to recognize Christ as their sanctification, as well as salvation, as the finisher, as well as the author of their faith. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," remembering "it is God that worketh in you." Ye can do nothing of yourselves, ye can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth you.

A larger portion take another view apparently more humble, but more paralyzing in its results. They so spiritualize spirituality as to leave it without essence or substance. Their idea

of increasing piety is too ethereal to be practical ; too like a spirit to be embodied in a form. They seem to forget that the " Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," that God has come down to man, that he in very deed dwelleth with man, and that sanctified human nature has its part to work out in the miracle of grace. " Their strength is to sit still." They not only lie like the *impotent* man at the pool waiting for the moving of the waters, but seem to think that having become potent with the grace of God, they must still keep waiting for the moving. Mis-applying the truth that we can do nothing without God's grace helping us, and insisting upon our entire dependence upon it, they use this grandest of all encouragements as the miserable excuse for inactivity, turning the very grace of God into lasciviousness. They thus actually attempt, if not in words at least by inaction, to place the responsibility of their barrenness upon Jehovah. They lull themselves into a stupor, with the idea that they must wait for the influence of the Spirit ; as if the Spirit were not by right a conferred gift of theirs already in conversion, saying that it is only at special times they are to expect advancement. Such are swinging pendulum-like between a dead faith, on the one hand, and a blind fatality on the other. It is true that we are dependent upon the grace of God, but when this is implanted within us, a power of development is imparted therewith, and our human natures and wills are brought into relationship thereto. We are accountable for the measure of this Spirit we have, and we ourselves must decide whether it shall be our life business to advance in holiness. If we do our part, we are as sure of growth, as the farmer is of a harvest. He is as dependent upon rain and sunshine as we upon grace, and yet he does not sit idly trusting to these. Though God worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure, we

are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling ; and the two ideas are no more inconsistent than our own relations to Providence in the daily labours of life. In things temporal, seeming failures seldom utterly discourage ; and in the spiritual even these sources of error are eliminated ; for the Holy Spirit is ever ready to direct the Christian. The eye of faith has been bestowed, his grace has been granted unto us as the instrument, with which we may see the mighty things of God ; but we must apply the eye, or we shall not see. Because the ocean of God's love is boundless, and our dependence upon him complete, dissolve not away the idea of personal responsibility. Let grace and works have their appropriate relationship and conjunctive agency. The telegraph between us and God is erected, and grace, like electricity, has its appointed power. But *we* must keep perfect the connection, if we would have the grace to flow, and the dispatches of love sparkle in our hearts.

There is too much want of that concentration of our energies upon our spiritual success which makes it "our business to grow," which adapts the means which are of God to the ends which he ordains, and then looks forward with certainty to definite results. Because religion has to do with our spiritual natures, we are not to mystify it in its practical workings. There are things in the plan of redemption and providence which we know not now ; but in the matter of grace-growth there are no mysteries which we cannot understand sufficiently for all practical purposes. Let a converted man in the fear of God, looking to him for aid, deliberately make up his mind, that it is to be his every-day business to grow in grace, and he will be sure to make such effort as will secure the result.

It is not wonderful that many do not prosper in advancing

self-holiness in this world. They never reach this pre-requisite of a fixed conviction and determination as to the duty. They do not let grace-growth enter as an item into their daily calculations. If they have progressed at all, it has been by the unaided Spirit and an occasional resolve. Men know how much they have made in a secular business; for they study the figures. But they doubt where they stand in grace; for they have not taken account of it. Their life is not intent upon its accumulation. The widow before the unjust judge made her plea her business, and sought with importuning earnestness, until she had success; and shall not God the just avenge, that is, answer his own elect, who cry unto him day and night. Shall not he bestow more abundantly his grace, and cause them to grow in that which is true prosperity? Every honest, honourable, energetic element we use, when intent on secular gain, will tell, if brought to bear upon our spiritual aggrandizement. Having once received, if we would know and possess the growing opulence of God's grace, we must by fixed choice make of growth in grace a business. In this exercise of religion, as in every other, faith and works go together. "If a man," says Faber, "puts *self*-improvement before him as the end of life, almost every step that he takes will be wrong. If he works away at himself as a sculptor finishes off a statue, he will get more out of proportion and bring out more black marks and gray blotches the longer he chisels." But the true grace-grower does not expect to advance by means of self-culture or resolve alone. "He refers everything but *diligence* to God. He models himself in his measure and degree on the imitation of Jesus. He seeks to please God; and acts out of love. An imperfection annoys him, not because it mars the symmetry of his character, but because it

grieves the Holy Ghost." The man who looks to Faith for all his growth, and yet makes no effort of his own, is at best a salt-pillar beside the fruitless calm of a Dead Sea. He who starts out single-handed spiritually to improve himself, "the bitterness of endless piece-meal failure is ever in his heart." He who combines both as Jesus and his grace directs, "the gaiety of endless success is his." He pleases God, and his spiritual enemies are at peace with him. His foundation is sure, his progress substantial, and the crown of glory awaits him.

VIII. THE NEXT CONDITION WE NOTICE IS, THAT WE MUST
BE SATISFIED THAT THE MEANS OF GRACE ARE GOD'S
REGULARLY APPOINTED INSTRUMENTS FOR OUR GROWTH
IN HOLINESS.

The methods must not only be the instituted ones, but must be recognized by the believer as the only appointed powers which he is to rely upon for the furtherance of his spiritual interest. Even after grace has been planted in the heart, there is a lingering of the tendency to choose our own ways for righteousness. Like the Jews, we are seeking for some other sign ; or like Dives, we desire that some other means of grace might be instituted, which to us seem in theory more effectual ; but if we hear not Moses and the prophets, Christ and the apostles, neither would we hear, though one rose from the dead.

In order to growth, we must recognize certain definite methods for conforming us more and more to his image and likeness.

These means of grace have not been the same in all ages.

Dreams and visions were the first communications of God with his people ; or Jehovah himself, or by his angels, spake directly to his chosen. Then the ceremonial law, with its precise ritual, the tabernacle, the ark, the holy of holies, the Shekinah, the temple with its imposing and solemn worship, the appointed fasts and festivals, the prophets, and all the types and ceremonies which pointed to the great High Priest to come, were the means by which the faithful of the earth drew nigh, and made increase in holiness. Even amidst these, God gave the evidence that he must be approached in the way of his own appointment. When Nadab and Abihu would come with strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not, though of the very family of the High Priest, they died before him. When the company of Korah would assume a position God had not assigned them, the earth swallows them up. He who, contrary to the law of grace then in operation, touched the ark, was immediately smitten. God as a king had appointed his own way, by which he would bestow mercy, and the means of grace were such as Infinite Wisdom saw fit to ordain. It was his prerogative to pardon by his own method. *It was enough for man to know that he could be pardoned at all.* But a more full and blessed dispensation is that under which we live. Life and immortality have not only been promised, but brought to light in the Gospel. While under the old economy, men were saved by faith in a Saviour to come, we are saved by faith in a Saviour that has come. Instead of types and shadows, we have all the history of the actual event ; all the tidings of the Gospel to clear up the mysteries of the past. The advent and life, miracles and instructions, sufferings and death, resurrection and ascension of our Redeemer, the fulfillment of prophecy, the testimony of apostles, and the

gift of the New Testament, with the fulness of its revelation, multiply the sources of spiritual comfort, stability, and advance in holiness. No wonder that the command to grow in grace comes to us as the test of a living spirituality. No one, we presume, who has really tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious, that he is his own personal Redeemer, will fail to recognize certain ordinances and privileges of the Christian, as rightly called "means of grace;" and if so, the very fondness for this grace which his profession affirms, without the least argument, commits him to the earnest use of them.

The rich foretaste already enjoyed has given him an appetite which will not be appeased without more grace. Inasmuch as one grace cannot push aside another, by this accumulation of favour there will be growth; and thus the means of grace, and of growth in grace, become after conversion identical.

But in order that these should be duly appreciated and employed by the Christian, there must be the practical conviction that they are the regularly ordained, and in general the only appointed methods and instrumentalities, by which the favour of God and progress in holiness can be secured. If these are only partially relied upon, or like every day mercies regarded as not worthy of special notice, we so dilute the sense of their importance, as to make them too weak remedies for such sin-sick souls. But like these every day blessings, the ordinary means of grace are to be regarded as the chief reliance for our soul's nurture, not by virtue of innate efficiency, but because God has appointed them as the methods in which he will be approached. Order is the rule of God's moral universe. As he has decreed laws by which the grand harmony of the world is sustained, so he has instituted a spiritual order, by which we are to attain definite results in the kingdom of grace. The

care with which the whole Gospel plan is declared, the mode in which faith, prayers, ordinances, Christian doctrines and duties, are explained and enforced, the institution of the Christian church, the permanent instrumentalities established for the conversion of sinners and the upbuilding of saints, the character of the Bible, and its plain declarations confirmed by the experience of centuries, with one accord point us to a regulated system, complete in all its appointments. We must make use of the chosen channels, if we would have this grace, and if we would have it more abundantly.

We by no means deny that God may by extraordinary methods impress and arouse his people, just as in his own good pleasure he may see fit to suspend a law of material creation. But the case is rare, and we at least have no right to rely upon such interposition. Besides those for whom he does this, are not likely to be those who will not work out their salvation by the usual methods ; but rather those who are joyfully growing in the use of the ways of his appointment. It is in fact generally as the result of an earnest awakening of his people in the use of his chosen methods, that the diffusion of his Spirit among the unconverted is most signally manifested. Even the day of Pentecost came when the people were all assembled, and waiting with one accord in prayer for the promise of the Father. Since the glories which ushered in the gospel dispensation, more and more are we dependent upon an earnest use of appointed means for the baptism of the Spirit, and for all advance in our spiritual life. Surely it behooves us with devout thanksgivings for the abundance of the plain and recognized means of grace, not to be idly expecting special interferences, to make us in some uncommon way better Christians ; but rather to be diligent in the ways of God's appointment, that

we may attain the presence and baptism of the Holy Ghost, and growth in holiness. Let us feel that God has already instituted the methods of spiritual advancement; and let us resolve that we will be zealously affected in perfecting that which concerneth us.

IX. IT IS REQUISITE TO FULL GROWTH IN GRACE THAT WE BE SATISFIED AS TO WHAT THESE MEANS OF GROWTH ARE, AND HOW WE MAY RECEIVE FROM THEM THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL CULTURE.

The first point is happily not very difficult to decide. The will of God is so plainly expressed in his word, and history and experience so far illustrate it, that there are certain duties and practices which, by the common consent of all Christians, even those that neglect them, are regarded as appointed methods of maintaining and increasing an earnest spirituality. They belong just as much to religion as power, and motion, and feeling belong to life. The importance of some of these means of grace, is not fully recognized; but this arises more from a want of examination, than from any real difference of opinion. A few others, such as affliction and the like, are not always present or constant in their operation, but are readily distinguished; and when they do occur are alike capable of being improved to our spiritual advantage. Peculiar temptations or emotions may lead us at times to use with especial devotion, some one or more of the means, but not to the exclusion of the rest; and no circumstances can modify the settled conviction that the more fully we avail ourselves of all, the more likely we are to be blessed. *We* may vary, but *they* are the appointments of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day,

and for ever, with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning, and who has located in his chosen methods of grace, an agency through which we can always receive a share in full proportion to our use.

Another point less determinate, but equally important, is how we may obtain from them the highest possible *amount* of growth in holiness. Without attention to this, we degenerate into mere formalists; we go through the motions without the emotions; but God is a *Spirit*, and they that worship must worship him in spirit and in truth. The robes of Christ's righteousness are to give glory and power to the ordinances, and his mantle must cover us. When men make a virtue of the mere form, and religion to them comes to consist in ceremonies cold as twilight amid icebergs, a cheerless gloom encompasses the soul in its barrenness. The fault is not in the means of growth; but the heart of unbelief casts its own stony nature upon them, until so far as the individual is concerned it destroys their vitality. Yet this does not authorize or argue their abandonment. Without the means we are lost. They must be maintained, but the evil is to be corrected. The power is still there, and the apparent deadness is of human origin. But even those who do enjoy somewhat the means of grace, who are built up thereby, and who feel in them a spiritual power, cannot too thoroughly study and investigate them. We not only wish to grow, but to obtain from them the greatest possible amount of growth. So rich are the means of grace in all the elements of spiritual progression, that we should use most earnestly these best gifts, and strive to taste of their fullness. It is a noble and worthy exercise for the Christian to endeavour to comprehend to the utmost the means he is using for his advancement. Here is a theme for his most ardent study.

Here are heights and breadths, lengths and depths, which, though measureless, are constant available sources of grace, joy, and peace. We need primarily to fix our attention upon them, that we may arrive at a truer appreciation of their completeness. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss." Alas! that we should be so near the line of duty, recognizing and performing the outward acts, and yet fail of the inward delights. Surely it becomes us to summon our hearts to the study of the whole method in its outlines and details, and to come to the instituted treasuries, not only with the right keys, but with hands to turn them, and hearts to appropriate the exhaustless abundance within.

We have thus noted a few of the pre-requisites to growth in grace—of those things which to the Christian should be not transient ideas, but settled principles and axioms of his Christianity. We do not presume the believer to be perfected in these before he must seek to grow in grace; but a conviction of their importance, and an earnest longing for them, are pre-requisite to a diligent and efficient employment and enjoyment of spiritual ordinances. These convictions will energize his growth, and his growth confirm and practicalize the convictions. Thus the principles of religion gloriously act and react on each other. There is direct and reflex power. For instance, we must have faith in order to grow, and must grow to have faith; and yet there is no contradiction. Each lends to the other a helping hand; grace, the pre-requisites of grace, and the means of grace, assist and develope each other; until commingling into one, all distinctions vanish between them; and *Grace* is the condensed synonym of the soul's fulness.

To such, works and grace are not conflicting ideas, but an efficient, co-existing unity. Grace promotes the works, and

works secure the grace ; and both are indissoluble activities for good. Never have I known an earnest, growing Christian much troubled about the relation of the two. He relies upon the grace as we do for seed-time, harvest, and food, upon rain, sunshine, and promises ; and at the same time goes on, like the husbandman, doing all he can to secure the harvest.

With God's help already secured in conversion, if *we appreciate the real means of grace, and with an earnest spiritual industry understand how most efficiently to employ them*, we shall go on steadily growing "till we come into the unity of the faith, and of the *knowledge* of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

To investigate these points will be our delightful effort in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER V.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

PRAYER—READING THE SCRIPTURES.

We have thus far attempted to consider grace in its origin and its attributes ; its relations to God and man ; the reasons natural and direct why we should grow therein ; and the prerequisite convictions necessary to a full appreciation of our duties and privileges. We are thus properly brought to the contemplation of the individual means of growth in grace ; and to inquire, in connection with each, how it must be exercised, in order to receive from it the most abundant spiritual advantage.

And with what humility should we attempt such an inquiry ! It pertains to the deep things of God, and the dearest interests of man. It is an attempt to grasp the methods of infinite love, and to define and compass the links which bind us to immortality. It has to do with the essence and substance of spiritual vitality. Life !—Eternal Life ! Death !—Eternal Death ! are the alternatives concerned. It is our duty and our privilege to look into these things ; but we need grace to guide us aright. Let us earnestly ask for divine illumination, that we may be led to a correct discernment of the way of increasing holiness ; and that being transformed by the renewing of our minds, we may prove what is that *good* and acceptable and perfect will of God.

The first means of growth in grace to which we naturally turn our thoughts, is prayer. Our converse now is with Christians ; and surely we have no need to prove this one of the appointed means of grace. The prayerless Christian is such a blank contradiction, that he who takes the name of follower of Christ, at once admits the life-necessity of prayer. This way to grace is the admitted way to grow in grace. About as many true Christians try the experiment of living without it, as try that of physical life without food. If there is any grace in the heart, and by some insidious temptation prayer is for a time suspended, there is a felt darkness about the soul. It gropes, it feels as if in chains, or in a dungeon. Unrest as a sad contrast to the peace and joy of believing is the sad experience. There is a looking and a longing after this element of prayer, as the "Christian's native air." But while all agree as to the duty, there is much variety of conception as to the scope and fulness of its power. To compass its full idea is of necessity to experience its blessedness in one's own individual exercise of it.

Almost every attempt to define prayer has for this very reason been a failure. Description may trace its features, but cannot feel its power. Hence the best ideas of it are drawn from experiences rather than from definitions. The poor publican, who would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," in one heart utterance, conveys to us an idea of the humility, adoration, confession, and petition of prayer ; and of its thanksgiving too, for as he went down to his house justified, it was as the recipient of mercy. The ruler worshipping Jesus and saying, "My daughter is even now dead, but come and lay thy hand upon her and she shall live," exhibits the faith of

prayer better than a volume of mere word-painting. The little child, who when asked how she came to Christ, replied, "As to a father whom I respect and love, who is my friend, who is able and willing to give, and knows what is best for me," gives us a better idea of prayer, than any cold synonym can.

The poor Indian, when asked how he prayed to God for pardon, said, "Oh sir, I just beg." That was the sense of personal want, and faith in the power of the one addressed.

Amidst associations where the language of religion is so common, we often need to turn to the plain Scripture narratives, to the simplicity of the child, or the faith of the heathen, catching the first pure light of truth. It is one of the blessed peculiarities of the Bible, that it teaches us so much by example, rather than by definition, and thus gives us a clearer personal conception of duty. There are, however, certain principles which may guide the devout seeker in his longings to know more of the infinite fulness of the means of grace.

I. WE NEED TO FEEL THE GREATNESS OF THE PRIVILEGE.

It is no inherited or natural right, but one purchased by the death of the Son of God. When first brought into the kingdom, we feel that it is a great thing to be permitted thus to come to God through Christ the Mediator. But when prayer becomes habitual, does not the very force of the habit give it an air of commonness, and lead us to overlook the fact that even our *right* to come is a purchased one, the paid price infinite?

What ceremony to approach earthly monarchs! How these require the surroundings of a precise and rigid formality, and deck themselves with the imposing externals of royalty, to impress the ideas of privilege and respect upon those admitted to

their presence ! Shall we who approach the blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, forget the intensity of the favour, because tedious rites are not imposed, and we have easy access to the mercy-seat ; since we are brought nigh by the blood of Christ ? As thou thinkest to enter upon the enjoyment, let thy soul consider and magnify the privilege. Seek a more vivid conception of the misery of man in the fall, the condescension of God in his rescue, the cost of the ransom, and the completeness of the redemption ; and beseech the Spirit to take of these deep things of God, and show thee the munificence of this thy favour.

II. WE SHOULD ENGAGE IN PRAYER, STRIVING TO FORM
JUST IDEAS OF GOD IN ALL THE VARIED CHARACTERS
AND ATTRIBUTES IN WHICH HE HAS MADE HIMSELF
KNOWN TO US.

It is to God the Almighty, the Allwise, our Father. It is to God as Christ, our Redeemer, our Immanuel, our Advocate. It is to God the Spirit, our Indweller, our Sanctifier, our Comforter, the Preserver of our spiritual life, we come. God has made himself known to the Christian in those particulars in which he is to be worshipped. In each of the prominent names by which he is called, there is a depth of significance, a conception of which may well seek form and utterance in our approaches to the throne. Enough of the mystery of the Godhead has thus been rent in twain to give us gracious glimpses of the Holy of Holies ; and it is ours here to look, and learn, and love.

Here is God revealing himself to a helpless mortal ; and in this act of approach he is ready to expand our conceptions,

that he may satisfy our desires. These very names are at the best but inadequate human words, the signs of an essence to be extracted and developed ; tasted and felt in prayer by the believer hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It is for the soul in these hours of communion with God to seek by the Spirit's aid to look upon these unveiled glories of the heavenly Father's presence.

III. HUMILITY AND SOLEMNITY SHOULD EVER BE PROMINENT EMOTIONS, AS WE BEND BEFORE THE THRONE.

Humility is indeed a natural accompaniment of a sense of privileges conferred. As we contemplate the goodness and condescension of God in permitting us to pray, and in confirming to us benefits incalculably worth praying for, with even more propriety than the psalmist amidst natural grandeur, may we beholding and enjoying this spiritual wonder, cry out, "What is man that thou art mindful of him or the Son of man that thou visitest him?" With equal force, because it is all of grace, may we exclaim in the grand climax of the argument on faith ; "Where is boasting then ? It is excluded."

It is not by mere temporary resolves and efforts that such lowliness is to be attained. It is only a legitimate fruit of a true sense of God's mercy and our own ill desert ; and we need to beseech the Spirit so to show this unto us, that the result may be attained. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. "If my people shall humble themselves and pray, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sin."

Nor can we appreciate too deeply the solemnity of prayer. A sinful mortal is before the pure and holy God, and eternal suffer-

ing or eternal joy are the alternatives of failure or success. Do we not sometimes forget the serious position we occupy? There are some who at times pray with a heedless familiarity, or with a careless pompousness, as if patronizing the Deity; or with coldness, or unthinking wordiness, which seems to lack the felt reality of the exercise. This permitted familiarity with God must have the element of reverential respect. We are on the gracious terms of allowed fellowship, but not of equality. There must be the "fear of God" so often spoken of in Scripture; not the fear of the condemned criminal, but that of the pardoned culprit, dreading ever again to offend his Lord and Judge, the Author and Giver of his pardon. By the offering of Christ, mercy itself has the solemnity of justice attached to it. God with man, is not the less the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity.

Thoughtless words upon a thoughtless tongue are too nigh blasphemy to be spoken here. Even the Christian needs often to contemplate God in the sublimity of his power, justice, and glory, as well as in his condescension and love. Our liberty is not the liberty of man, but that wherewith Christ sets his people free; the liberty of adoration as well as of love; or rather as a part of love—a solemn realization of God Immanuel as "a spirit infinite, eternal, unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." We stand on holy ground; but blessed be God, it is to meet "the Father of all them that believe," "the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort," and to have that fear which is "the beginning of wisdom" and a "fountain of life."

IV. ANOTHER ELEMENT IN OUR PRAYERS MUST BE
EARNESTNESS.

"Easiness of desire," says Jeremy Taylor, "is a great enemy to the success of a good man's prayer. It must be an intense, zealous, busy, operative prayer. For consider what a huge indecency it is, that a man should speak to God for a thing that he values not." The argument is all on the side of fervency at the throne of grace. Our business is urgent. Our all is at stake. It is the "effectual, fervent prayer," or as the original would be more significantly expressed, the laboriously energetic prayer, "of a righteous man that availeth much"—

"Thou art coming to a king;
Large petitions with thee bring;
For his grace and power are such
None can ever ask *too much*."

We cannot over magnify the willingly dispensed abundance of the God we address, or the extent of our necessities. But the terms of reception are definite; and all the energy and attention we give to business in order to success, are legitimate, when we come to this the most weighty business transaction of a mortal. *Devotion* in its relation to success in secular occupations has no different significance from that which attaches to it in reference to the closet. Devotedness must be the soul of our devotions. It is proper that a word expressing intense earnestness should thus be a familiar name of this exercise.

Prayer must needs be both intellectually, morally, and physically fervent. We are to serve God therein with the heart and the soul, the mind and the strength. We should value intellectual culture, and reasoning powers, as they enable us to see more fully the wisdom and mercy of God; our emotions

should be such as are characteristic of earnest feeling, and intense impression ; and our bodies too are to be presented in prayer, as obedient to the laws of thorough conviction, and as pervaded and energized by ardent principles. We do not mean that violent gesticulations, or manual enthusiasm are to be sought ; but if men feel intellectually and spiritually, the body will assume postures befitting interest and desire. That indolent piety which supinely and uniformly chooses the bed for its altar, or the most tired hour for spiritual communings, has no type or *illustration in the recorded prayers of eminent saints*. The Holy Spirit uses many of the same means for developing and increasing our piety, as fit us for more worldly experiences. Often instead of sudden illumination, it requires us to follow laboriously after Christian truth, through the demonstration of human reasoning ; and when mind has done its part, it sheds down the ineffable brightness of spiritual illumination, and the joy and peace of believing encompass the soul. It compels us for our good to take time to calculate our emotions, as we would in the common sympathies of earthly friendship ; and then sanctifies them with the zeal of a holy ecstasy, and sets apart mind and body to the service of God. Thus it takes the natural history of enthusiasm, which belongs to sincerity and earnestness in any pursuit, and giving it the earnest of the Spirit, makes the fervency of prayer a felt necessity beyond all other earnestness incomparable. How some good men have by word or act left us their conceptions of this holy energy.

Luther, living in prayer and faith until his devout earnestness became a holy boldness ; Bunyan, the same intense prayer and worker in Bedford jail, or kneeling with the London poor ; Doddridge, the "ardent man of God" with his recorded prayers and hymns full of this spiritual unction ; Wesley, not ashamed

to be called a zealot for his praying; Whitfield, whole hours prostrate on the ground pleading for pardon and for souls; Edwards, beseeching and imploring until enchanted with spiritual delight; Payson, agonizing in prayer; and Newton, Vicars, and many others, have incidentally afforded us glimpses of the intensity of their desires and the earnest method of their growth in grace. They prayed as if they meant it. Our Bible prayers are full of this holy earnestness. The wrestling Jacob was the prevailing Israel; Daniel supplicated with fasting and sackcloth and ashes; and the full petition recorded in the ninth chapter, brought its answer. Bartimeus, seeking his sight; the Grecian woman, supplicating for her daughter; the teachings of Jesus as to importunity, the all night of prayer, the three prayers of the garden; have we not precept and example enough to lead us to call on God with full hearts and earnest entreaties? Crying, beseeching, imploring, begging, such are the terms used to express the sincere longings of earnest souls. And where is earnestness more appropriate than at the throne of grace? We already by grace rejoice to know something of the God to whom we come, of our pressing need, of the promises and of the faith by which we may lay hold upon them; and with these outlines of the method of grace, and an inheritance already purchased, is there not enough to inspire an enthusiasm of which the strongest words give an inadequate conception? "Heart" says Arthur, "is the greatest thing below the sky," and our whole hearts must be in this service of prayer. There must be the pressing sense of want, a definite view of the tender mercies of Jehovah, an allowance of proper time for devotion, an emptying of self, reliance upon the fulness of the Spirit, in order to inspire us with this abiding zeal in prayer. It is not

something to be acquired by mere resolve ; and here is where we often mistake. Earnestness is not a mere emotion, but the result of a beseeching for the aids of the Spirit, and of a careful study of the attributes of God as exhibited in the plan of salvation. Devotion is a *business* to be pursued ; and the pledge of our success is that Deity himself is interested therein. Every thing else but Christ and salvation are side issues. "Continue in prayer and watch in the same." "In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

V. IN ORDER THAT THE HIGHEST VALUE OF THE MEANS
OF GROWTH IN GRACE MAY BE SECURED, PRAYER
MUST BE EXERCISED IN ALL ITS DEPARTMENTS.

It is possible to overlook or only partially to enjoy some of the states of feeling which are justly included in this one complex, expressive word.

There is the *adoration* of prayer, which leads us to consider the Almighty God in sublime contrast with impotent man, and the homage due from a subject to his king, from a pardoned rebel to his forgiving monarch, from a condemned sinner to a Saviour suffering in his stead, and purchasing his deliverance. There is the *confession* of *guilt* in all its multiplied forms, rendered more heinous by our knowledge of the attributes of God. Abundant *thanksgivings* too, here find their most befitting utterance ; for "every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." But the foun-

tain of grace is exhaustless, and we can come with confidence, asking for more. *Petition* thus gives its name to prayer, and warrants a faith well nigh limitless in this, as a means of spiritual growth. Here is the seeking place to satisfy the hungry and thirsty soul. "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

"Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea all I need, in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come."

Such is the scope of our petitions in prayer; and not only this, but we may pray for others also, and our very supplications for them conduce to our own growth in grace. There is spiritual nourishment in the command of Christ to pray even for our enemies; and there is spiritual comfort and delight in the privilege of praying for our friends. Their needs, as well as our own, we may bring before God's altar, and blessings for our neighbours, for the church, for our country, for the world, we may there implore. "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."—Job xlii. 10.

Under special providences, or peculiar circumstances, our hearts may especially incline to some one of these varied departments of devotion. At one period, the sovereignty of God and his glory may be made by the Spirit so manifest, that like Isaiah, we may see the Lord upon his throne, and feel the awful grandeur of his holiness, and cry out, "Woe is me! for I

am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips !” But if so, we are like the prophet, in a proper state to hear the voice from the mercy-seat, “ Lo—thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged.”

At other times the multitude and flagrancy of our sins may so overwhelm us, that we can only plead in the spirit of penitential psalms ; and anon the tender mercies of God so impress us with gratitude, that the heart is too jubilant to ask for more. Yet we need habituate ourselves to all the types and phases of prayer, that with the Spirit teaching us, all may mingle in our devotions, and our souls rise, on the wings of faith, to the heights of this blessed ordinance. Thus may we grow in grace.

VI. PRAYER, THAT WE MAY REAP FROM IT THE FULL MEASURE OF GROWTH IN GRACE, MUST BE DIRECT AND TO THE POINT.

It may easily lose its force in generalities. We need to specify our emotions and desires before God, in order to acquaint ourselves with them. Indefiniteness is always unsatisfactory, unproductive ; and never so much as in worship. Unless we are clear, precise, specific as to our feelings and state, we dilute the strength and power of prayer. It is easy for the Christian to say, I have sinned—I have sinned. But in the general confession, we do not always recognize the particulars, wherein we have transgressed. If after having deceived ourselves with general acknowledgments, we for once go to work to nail each sin, we will find the world, the flesh, and the devil ready to contend with us ; explaining away the fault, transferring the responsibility, until, if we are sincere, the depravity

of our own hearts is made the more manifest by the very unwillingness of our carnal natures to be exposed to the light of the Spirit. So in adoration, in thanksgiving, in petition, we need ever to single out the occasions for each of these. We must analyze ourselves in our spiritual relations to God; and the analysis, though not requiring great power of reasoning, requires time, a sense of its importance, a beseeching of the Holy Spirit, and a searching after our sins, our mercies, and the realities of our desires. Those feelings will always be weak and inoperative which have not thus become conscious of themselves. A man may give thanks for his blessings, and really feel that he has occasion for some gratitude; but his sense of favour is as nothing compared with that of him who has singled out and enumerated his mercies, so as to examine them in their divisions, rather than *en masse*. Like David, we must count and recount our benefits, if we would stir our hearts to commensurate service. The same is equally true of the other departments of prayer. We need to see the separate parts in their individuality, in order to comprehend the stupendous whole.

One reason why some professed disciples pray so little, is that they glide so rapidly over the subjects of prayer. It is easy to do this, if single sentences are made to express our whole adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or petition. It is impossible to do this, if we once recognize the fault, and have a mind to the work of beholding in detail what there is in God to adore, in self to confess, in blessings to value, and in petitions to desire. How many hours of blessed enjoyment do many lose for the want of this process! How many more could we all enjoy, if we would more earnestly seek to look into these things, for then the Holy Spirit would show them unto

us. There is even some danger of giving too great prominence to petition if we only slightly feel this duty of analysis. For men naturally think more of what they want, than of the God they should reverence, the sins they have committed, and the blessings they have received. If we remember these, our petitions will catch the reflected glow and fervor, and with greater unction ascend like incense before God.

What occasion have I to serve and adore Jehovah? What are my sins? What are my mercies? What is my petition and desire? These are questions we cannot too frequently consider, and by the blessing of our heavenly Father, we shall find our occasion for prayer and our growth therein delightfully manifest.

With such precise and definite views of our relations in this service of privilege, we place ourselves in the most befitting attitude of devout worship; and our hearts touched by a live coal from off the altar, will be warmed with the sweet enjoyments of the saints. The glad hour of prayer will be felt as a recreation to the soul.

VII. PRAYER MUST BE EXERCISED IN ALL ITS FORMS AND VARIETIES.

Secret Prayer.—The still hour alone with God, is the central idea of this great communion with Jehovah. If we go not alone to the altar, to have fellowship with the Father of our spirits, all our other spiritual approaches will be fruitless and unavailing.

"Thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

This is the very first direction of our Saviour on the subject of prayer. The outgoings even of our public prayers have this fundamental origin. Social or public petition cannot occupy the place of this. It is the foundation upon which the superstructure of devotion is to be builded upward and heavenward. We are never content to see our cherished earthly friends only amid company and assemblages. We desire interchanges of thought and feeling with our loved ones alone. And is not fellowship with Jesus precious enough to prompt desires to enjoy it where no one else attends, and where the voice of a stranger cannot enter? That is a questionable piety which prays more in public than in private; more abroad than at home. Meagre growth in grace is a legitimate result of little closet prayer. It is not that our acceptance is measured by hours; but true affection, actual enjoyment, great entertainment, is not constantly attempting to abbreviate itself. When these come to be valued and appreciated, they take reasonable opportunity for their development.

With the Christian who feels the blessing of secret prayer, stated periods for the exercise will be provided for in the order of daily life; and these appointments will be filled as well as others. It is an item of business demanding careful, indispensable attention. If for any good cause there is an occasional omission, it will be regarded as an unavoidable exception, not a desirable rule. We must take time to pray.

The higher laws of our fellowship with man are not changed, but intensified in our relations to God. If we would love him, and be like him, and know him as he is, we must habitually commune with him in this his chosen way of meeting us. As you value your soul, and the delights of its salvation, slight not this precious enjoyment. If you do not really feel it to be

such a favour, consider your occasions for prayer, its meaning, the zeal which devout and holy men have exhibited therein, and as "all acceptable prayer is founded on distinct views of doctrine," strive to understand the revealed history of redemption. For a *redeemed sinner* to neglect, or hastily use or abuse prayer, is a weeping sadness. Go to this private spot, and with a Christian's heart ask, and continue asking to be taught how to pray and what to pray for, and as sure as is the "*Faithful Promiser*" the Spirit will help your infirmities. It is not for others to specify the number or length of our approaches; but it is for you to judge whether you are feeding or starving your graces amid the fulness of this mercy-seat. Brought nigh by the blood of Christ, it is the Christian's rightful heritage; but if he will not enjoy it, like a lamb without the fold, he will want, and wander still.

With earnest and stated secret communion with God, as the keystone to the sacred arch of prayer, it will not be difficult to appreciate the value of other forms. To one who is frequent and urgent in this, *ejaculatory prayer* is an almost spontaneous growth, an unavoidable necessity. The soul, accustomed to look to Jesus, will, as by a spiritual instinct, perceive and feel frequent occasions for adoring, confessing, beseeching, and praising; and the short sweet sentences of devotion will mingle with daily life, as the flavouring essence to our temporal existence. It is the gracious privilege of the Christian, so to educate his heart, that a spiritual tendency will rule and overrule amid all the allotments of life. It is thus that we are to fulfil the apostolic injunction to pray without ceasing, to continue, and watch unto prayer, and be instant therein, so that we may really live in the fresh atmosphere of devotion. Too few indeed feel the graciousness of this state; but those who most enjoy

the worship of the private hour, have also this abiding fellowship with the Father of their spirits, which spreads brightness about the daily pathway of life. These outbreathings of the soul are the befitting, unrestrained utterances of sincere hearts; for in all the diverse scenes of existence, these communings may exist. Thus the Christian has, amid the routine and bustle of secular duty, a comfort and joy, of which the passing world knoweth not.

We should accustom ourselves often to call upon God in this method, for there is no surer way of resisting temptation. We thus have on our buckler, shield, and helmet, ever ready to meet the assaults of the adversary. Thus in every position and emergency of life we may look to a friend that sticketh closer than a brother; and though living in the world, be kept from the evil that is therein. Religion is not an outer garment to be put on and off at pleasure, but an abiding principle, a holy spirit within, an inwrought integral part of character. Even the Christian is too prone to separate his religion from his secular life. That God who clothes the lilies of the field, and notes the sparrow when he falls, will follow the sincere worshipper as he passes from the closet to the busy mart, and then by this upsoaring of the heart in prayer enable him to do whatsoever he does to his glory. The roots of this tree of life will penetrate his nature until there is beauty for deformity, and Christian propriety presiding over worldliness. Thus it is that in the secularities of life, we are enabled to have a daily walk with God. Short and fragmentary, though these outbreathings of the soul may be, their brevity is far different from that of those who neglect or hastily perform the secret prayer. In the one case, the devotion is contracted because there is no sense of the want of the soul, the merits of Jesus'

salvation, and our relations to God; in the other, these compressed sentences are the epitome and condensed utterance of a full experience, the germinating abundance of a secret spiritual life. Here is private prayer carrying its altar with it, amidst the daily contacts of time. Disciple of Jesus, cultivate this frequent out-reaching to clasp the hand that has rescued thee. Restrain not secret prayer, so shall thy growth in grace be perennial.

Family worship, as a division of prayer highly conducive to the soul's growth in holiness, is next in importance to those who from their relations in life are called upon to unite therein. As the Christian members of the household meet around the family altar, and there commune with God, while the head acts as a daysman between the family and Christ, there is an element of growth highly conducive to spiritual progress. It is a soil in which the true religion of the heart delights to flourish. Family religion is itself a growth of grace; and where it exists, the voice of family prayer will not be silent. It is the absence of this that neutralizes many serious impressions of more public ordinances, and keeps many a professed Christian below his own standard of duty. The prophetic prayer of Jeremiah invoked the fury of the Lord "upon the heathen that knew him not, and upon the families that called not upon his name." Surely such associations are unfavourable to grace-growth. I know not how, without it, the Christian can "command his household after him," or resolve with them to serve the Lord. By the worldliness of children reared without this influence, more than once have I seen the standard of the parents' faith brought lower. It is not safe for those who would grow in grace to neglect a duty which the most eminent Christians have ever valued and enjoyed. It was

when the ark abode in the house of Obededom, that he and his household were blessed. I cannot believe that Cornelius the devout feared God with all his family, and yet never prayed with them. "Observation," says Dr. J. W. Alexander, "shows that families which have no household worship are at a low ebb in spiritual things." But it is not within the compass of our design to trace the manifold advantages of family devotion, but only to draw attention to it as one item in the advance of personal holiness.

As we meet morning and evening to commend our cherished friends to a heavenly Father's care, or solemnly ask his blessing upon the daily food, if we feel the service as it behooves us, we link our fellowship with Jesus to the amenities and friendship of home-life, cultivate a habit of looking to God in our collective relations, and exercise a sense of dependence upon him, which is a highly valuable element of spiritual growth. By thus carrying the altar from the closet to the family circle, we are the better able to continue its influence with us in the arena of business-care. Our ministrations in the household present a restraint from sin, and an argument for circumspect consistency at home and abroad. As we commend our dearest interests to God and to the word of his grace, we may with the apostle joyfully feel that he is able to build us up and give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

"When, kneeling down, to Heaven's eternal King
The saint, the father, and the husband prays,
Hope 'springs exulting on triumphant wing!
That thus they all shall meet in future days,
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society yet still more dear,
While circling time moves round in an eternal sphere."

Surely here are grand elements of spiritual growth; and God by his Holy Spirit will be ever ready to upbuild us in the use of this precious privilege.

Public and social prayer will also be found by those who rightly exercise them, another occasion for progress in the divine life.

Religion is in its very nature communicative, associative; and as Christians unite with each other in one common petition to God, there is a mingling of sympathy favourable to spiritual impression and development. Even those who are silent need to feel their relations to the uttered prayer; for it is, "Let us pray." The desires of our hearts in the fellowship of devotion, the holiest and most solemn of interchanges this side of the grave, may well be intensified by these united thanksgivings and entreaties.

It is the duty too of those upon whom it naturally devolves, to *cultivate* the spirit of public prayer. When we stand before God, not only for ourselves, but in presence and behalf of others, and lead in supplication at the throne of grace, we exercise a privilege and responsibility which impose a careful circumspection of conduct and life. We are not to shrink from the duty, but rather to rejoice in it. It is often a source of blessing to ourselves and others. We must endeavour thereby to grow in the graces for which we implore, and to do our part in living out the spirit of our petitions. The gift of public prayer depends not so much on talents or education, as on spiritual-mindedness, and closet faithfulness. Hence the offerings of the plainest Christians are often most acceptable to God and most edifying to men. The heart, subdued by secret communications, will not want that holy unction which will make the public prayer a means of growth in holiness.

Besides these more usual occasions for prayer, there are extraordinary seasons when the soul is especially inclined to hold communion with God, when the heart is tender with emotion, and the whole being so moved upon by the blessed influences of the Spirit, that we cannot, must not resist the call to prayer. But it is not our design to attempt compressing in a few pages a subject in itself exhaustless, but only to stir up each Christian heart by way of remembrance, to seek more thoroughly to consider and feel the grace of prayer, to regard it as the efficient and definite method by which fruit and growth may be as certainly attained by the obscure, humble Christian, as by those who are permitted to be eminent examples of the growing grace of the gospel.

We must investigate prayer, examine the prayers of the Bible as models, be sure of our relations and wants; and then ask, waiting upon the Lord, not inactively but as he waits to be gracious. "The hour of prayer," "the power of prayer," "the privilege of prayer," the presence of the Father, of Christ, of the Spirit in prayer, should not, need not, be to us religious fictions, but grand and constant realities. In the diligent use of this means, we shall grow in grace and know the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. "He gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." Such prayer will have such grace-growth.

VIII. WE NEXT NOTICE, AS A MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE,
THE READING AND STUDY OF GOD'S HOLY WORD.

Glorious is that provision of divine goodness which places in possession of the Christian this guide-book to growth in holiness. With the Bible in our hands, it is scarcely possible for us to estimate how incomplete the light of nature and of providence would have been without it. The illustration and illumination it pours upon these render them so radiant and eloquent for God, that it is difficult to separate the blended rays, and conceive how the panorama would have appeared without an inspired word from its author. Our ideas of the most benighted heathenism are our nearest approach to the conception. To us, nature and providence speak as we say *naturally* of God. Without the Bible their light would have been only the mystical twilight from Infinity.

Upon us it is bestowed as the grand accompaniment of regeneration, and forms at once the repository of our faith and the guide to our practice. For historical accuracy it has endured the sternest criticism and elicited the admiration of centuries. As a law, it has enunciated the fundamental principles of jurisprudence. As a philosophy, it alone explains the phenomena of existence. As a book of morals, it has attracted the admiration even of those condemned by its purity. As a literary treasure, it has been prized by the masters of style and thought. With biography the most thrilling, narrative the most graphic, poetry pathetic, and sublimity profound, it has commanded admiration from the cold and rigid logician, as well as the glowing word-painter. The scholar has found it a rich treasury of earthly wisdom, and the very infidel has been so moved by the loving majesty of our Saviour on the cross,

as to exclaim, "If Socrates died like a philosopher, Jesus Christ died like a God."

Yet what are all these admirations of the carnal heart, compared to that which attaches to it in its spiritual relationship? Unworthy to be named beside its glory of glories, the central globe to which these are but incidental nebulae. The salvation-book to the sinner, and the grace-growth book to the saint, these constitute its central, chief absorbing grandeur. Having regenerated our hearts once dead in trespasses and sins, at the glad hour of new-birth, it is handed to us as the recipe of Christian progress, and bids us "as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby."

All Scripture is profitable for instruction in *righteousness*, that the man of God may be perfect. Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, and it is by adding to our faith and virtue this knowledge, that addition shall go on to godliness, and complete itself in charity. If one desires to learn how all the vicissitudes of a Christian's life are to be met, triumphs over spiritual foes to be attained, and increase in holiness secured, let him study the 119th Psalm. The Bible is a source of increase to us "better than thousands of gold and silver." It is a lamp and a light, illuminating not only the past and present, but making radiant the path for continuous advancement, and the promise to those who cherish it most, is that of "a great peace which nothing shall offend."

When Paul, expecting to see their faces no more, sent for the elders of Ephesus, as a pastor's last benediction, well might he with holy inspiration say, "I commend you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to *build* you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." Acts xx. 32. "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our

Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ," are not ideas inadvertently coupled together in the sacred paragraph; and here is the only complete education-book for such wisdom. "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth," was a petition in the intercessory prayer of the Saviour for the redeemed of the Lord. In the experience of growing saints, the answer has been abundantly realized. Surely we have evidence enough that the knowledge of God's word will be to us wisdom, sanctification, and perfection in righteousness.

Besides the testimony which the Bible itself verbally bears to its own power for spiritual progress, there are reasons why it should promote our advance in holiness which are easily recognized by an attentive perusal of its pages. It is a law of grace as well as of nature, that communion with that which is higher and purer than ourselves tends to elevate us to a higher standard of excellence. In reading this book, as in prayer, we hold communion with the Father of our Spirits, and listen while the pure and holy One is speaking. By precept and example, by warning and promise, by word and doctrine, by persuasion and love, it keeps before us the strongest incentives to unwavering faith, to an ever-abiding, ever developing holiness. For all the delights of Christian experience, it has its cup of additional joy, and in all our conflicts and emergencies it is the resourceful armory for our defence.

Is the Christian tempted? "His feet must be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace," and in his hands must be the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Then will he know that God is faithful, who will not suffer him to be tempted above that he is able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that he may be able to bear it. "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with

the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we, yet without sin." " He is able to succour them that are tempted." Is faith feeble, and do doubts and fears prevail ? " This is the word of faith." " Faith is by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Thus are we to be nourished up in the words of faith. " Fear not, for I have redeemed thee." " Why are ye so fearful ?" " Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." " Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." " Holding fast." " Looking to Jesus," the faithful promiser, the Lord our righteousness, " as the author and finisher of our faith." What would the Christian do without the abundance of such like cheering words ? Do afflictions spread their pall ? " Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." This is the " word of consolation." " Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." " No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous ; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the *peaceable fruits of righteousness* unto them which are exercised thereby." This is the book that shows us all, the way to grow in grace until with grace inwrought within us we may come to glory. Here is the mirror in which alone we can see Christ ; if we would grow in his likeness we must here behold him.

There is special need in this our day, of insisting upon the incomparable value of the word of God to the Christian, as an instrument for his spiritual advancement. With the great abundance of excellent religious publications, both in the form of books and papers, with which the perfection of the art of printing and the industry of good men are furnishing us, there is danger of our being drawn away from an intimate and accurate acquaintance with the Scriptures.

I lately remarked to a professing Christian, who seldom attended public worship, that I hoped she dearly prized the reading of her Bible at home? "Yes," said she, "but I have a book I like better than that;" pointing to a copy of Bunyan's Pilgrim. Does not this openly bespeak an experience shown to be too general by the reading habits of many a professed disciple? An earnest growing piety has ever been remarkable for a cherished fondness for the word of God. It speaks as never man spake, and is indeed "The Bible," the book, in grand pre-eminence above all others. It is the Gospel of sanctification, as well as of salvation. It contains the gladdest tidings, and the Christian can daily take it for his advance in that knowledge of which the consummation is eternal life. Those were not dark ages in the church, when at Scotland's firesides the Bible was the favourite book, or when the Waldenses knew no other written guide to immortality. When we see the eagerness there is for the diluted literature of the religious novel, or half-secular newspaper, we well may study the habits of earlier Bible saints, and profit thereby. Other books are truly desirable, as they reflect its doctrines and illustrate its precepts; but they fail of their object, unless they lead us to prize more highly the oracles of God, and to cry out, "Oh! how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day."

To be mighty in the Scriptures is a power of progress which nothing else can replace; and the piety of that Christian will show a steadily brightening glory, who daily warms it by a delighted perusal of the only pure words, which the lips of wisdom utter.

There are reasons why the careless and unconverted do not value this book. To them it is full of dark sayings, for they know not of the doctrine; full of condemnation, for they love

darkness rather than light ; full of judgment, for it proclaims eternal punishment to their souls. Even its offers of mercy are not appreciated by them.

But there is no reason why the Christian should not love and cherish it, and be nourished thereby into an expansive holiness. Yet even he, with the human, carnal nature still clinging to him, needs definite methods of perusal in order not to be disturbed by its deep things, and to be abundantly edified by its accessible fulness.

1. It must be read devoutly—*not as any other book ; but as the book of God, on which his especial blessing is to be sought. Its reading must be felt as an act of worship.*

We are to take it with us to the closet, and there, as we read, devoutly seek the Spirit's illumination to take of it, and show unto us, and to enable us, in public and in private, to profit thereby. It is not a sporting-ground for human learning, but a solemn spiritual exercise. We are not to lean unto our own understandings ; but seeking wisdom from above to bring secondarily and subsidiarily to our aid the treasures of earthly knowledge.

If perused as a man's book, as a diversion, as a field for critical acumen, or from mere compunctions of duty, how can we expect it to be to us the power of God ? But if with devout zeal we take it as the word of " Our Father," ready and able to assist us—to feed us from its inexhaustible abundance, we shall find it nourishing us to perfect men, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

2. It must be read with docility.

" Teach me thy statutes," must be the earnest longing of the converted soul. We come as learners to sit at the feet of our God, and to hear these precious words which proceed from his mouth.

There is much in the spirit in which we read. We have enrolled ourselves as members of the household of faith, and are to listen to the language of its divine Head, as those inquiring of a beloved Master, "What wilt thou have me to do?"

We have subscribed ourselves as subjects of God—the King; and here we come rejoicing in the terms and privileges of our allegiance. We have already settled the question whom we will serve, and are ready, leaving the first principles, to go on to perfection. Our effort now is to find out the will of our Lord; not to dispute the terms of our heirship, but to magnify the graciousness and glory of our inheritance. Difficulties may arise, passages which we do not comprehend, statements and details which we do not fully appreciate; but there is enough to feed our souls, to establish our hopes, to develope our graces, and contribute to our growth in holiness. As to all else we may rest upon the facts, that the most learned have been able to discover new illustrations of the goodness of God and the consistency of his truth, in the very things which have perplexed others; and that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. The minute history of tribes, the chronicles of names and lineages, the obscurity of some prophetic utterances, the narratives of superhuman occurrences, and the revelations of apocalyptic glory, have in them solemn eloquence of which even finite intellect and heart comprehend enough to make us feel, that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the *man of God* may be perfect." With all this and the precious promises in view, and with so much of the plan of salvation, so plain that the way-faring man, though a fool, need not err therein, we may reasonably

bow in docility to read and learn of the blessed Teacher the lessons of his will.

3. We must read studiously and systematically. The two are so indissolubly connected, that we need not dissociate them. This word has not only a surface beauty, but an inwrought, permeating, penetrating glory. Like the silver ranges of Peru, there is a sheen of beauty on the surface, but just below there is another mine of wealth, until at length the patient worker treads along the rich veins of sacred ore exhaustless as the abundance of God's grace.

How often does a passage which we have frequently read, exhibit a new power under some special providence, as we pause to ponder on its meaning! Who has not at some time of temptation, of bereavement, or of joy found his pathway lighted by some blessed sentences, from this good word, as like scattered diamonds they sparkle out a brightness, refreshing to the soul? What comfort in knowing these verses of consolation, support, and encouragement, which are scattered up and down its pages, so that memory can daily draw from the stores which study has collected!

It is the very last book which should be read carelessly. It is too heavily laden with precious things to be dispatched in haste. We are to handle carefully the word of God. The ancients had a proverb: "Take heed of the man of one book;" and the man of this one book who diligently studies it will show a growth in grace of which God and man and the angels who desire to look into it, will take heed. But system is indispensable to this studious acquaintance with the word of God. Whatever we would accomplish with success, must be done orderly, and we need no less a method in the perusal of this word, to reap the full abundance of its grace-growing yield.

We should have a specific time set apart for the exercise. As, like prayer, it is an act of worship, and a means of growth in grace, a stated period should be assigned to this special duty. Communion with God in his written truth, as a daily spiritual refreshment, we cannot afford to leave merely for odd times, or irregular intervals. There is too much grace in the book to justify sporadic perusal, and the "any time" is, alas! to too many no time at all. The reason why so many Christians do not appreciate it more, is because they have so little leisurely, frequent, regular familiarity therewith. The most earnest disciples have ever been its most humble, devout admirers. Partaking of the fulness of its grace, they have been able to exclaim, "How sweet are thy words to my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth."

We should adopt some definite plan by which the entire Bible may be perused. Not that we may not have our favourite parts, our most familiar words, our cherished sentences. But those who are in the habit of confining their readings to particular divisions, to the almost entire exclusion of the rest, will be astonished to find how much of interest and instruction there are in books and chapters neglected. Even in the most technical and historical parts, we light on some simple narrative, some earnest prayer, or condensed expression, which touches a new chord of spiritual life. If we adopt some distinct, decided plan, by which the whole shall be read within certain limits of time, we beget diligence in the pursuit, a habit of study, and find so much of connecting interest and narrative as to compensate for time spent on parts, which, by reason of human ignorance, we do not so fully appreciate. We need, in fact, an acquaintance with the whole, in order that our selections may be duly prized. Random read-

ings will not feed us with the finest of the wheat. One devout biblical scholar has pronounced the Pentateuch the most interesting part of Holy Writ; another has his holy zeal more kindled by the prophets; while Chronicles, and Canticles, and Job are full of instruction and grace to another. Able divines have seen so much of Christ in the Old Testament, as to claim for it the full interest of the New. If we bring together the diverse views of those learned in the Scriptures, as to which is the part most full of spiritual culture, we can but conclude that it is one glorious whole from which no chapter can be spared. It is all important for the growth of the soul.

4. It should be read with an understanding of the mutual connections of one part with another. We lose much of its power, if we only consider it in detached parts, or as subdivided into chapters, verses, and paragraphs by the art of man.

The 51st Psalm is more full of heart-melting penitential sorrow, if just before it we have read the parable of the ewe-lamb, and the sin and confession of an erring monarch. The Law and the Prophets, the Gospels and the Epistles are radiant with new light, when we behold each as a grand part of one sublime, perfect, stupendous whole—a unity of which grace divine love, is the one cementing power.

By the use of a small concordance, or of a Bible with references, and by reading the headings of each chapter, we can inform ourselves much as to the true intent and meaning of Scripture. There is such a thing as spending too much time on the illustrations and explanations of men. It is astonishing how much of Bible culture plain Christians can accomplish by a diligent, connected study of the word alone. As guides, however, a very few such books as Bishop Gleig's history, Angus' Bible Hand-Book, or Tyng's Aid will be found useful.

5. It must be read in faith and with an earnest reliance upon the guidance of the Spirit. It is as a revelation of God to man that its paramount importance attaches to it. If in it we accustom ourselves to hear God speaking to us as to his children, it becomes fraught with a meaning and power of which soul-culture is the unfailing fruit. Hence it is not a mere intellectual pursuit. Resting on this basis, it would at best but develope the powers of mind. But when we come to feel that the Divine Spirit takes of it and shows it unto us, this spiritual outflowing is as a fountain of life proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. We are thus brought to feel all our efforts energized by the power of the Holy Ghost making us to receive of its fulness, grace for grace. Let each Christian heart then endeavour to magnify by blessed experience the value of this word; and to feel it both as the power of God unto salvation, and as essential "thoroughly to furnish us unto all good works;" and to give us an inheritance among them which are sanctified.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

PROPER OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH—THE PUBLIC AND SOCIAL EXERCISES OF RELIGION.

THE proper spiritual observance of the Sabbath is another of the prominent means of growth in grace, which is very inadequately appreciated by many professors of religion. Its institution at the close of the week of creation was a moral sublimity grand as the work in which its author had been engaged. Creation was not complete until the Sabbath was made for man, and Jehovah rested from his labours. It was not the rest of weariness; for he sleepeth not, neither is weary. Hence the mere idea of physical quiet or repose is not the chief one in its appointment. "He blessed the seventh day and sanctified it," setting it apart from a common to a sacred use, as a holy day unto the Lord. The manna in the wilderness, the fourth commandment from Sinai, and the punishments inflicted on those desecrating it, plainly enough declare the strict observance of the Sabbath which God required of his chosen people.

A greater event than creation was redemption. Its completed work was more mighty than the ordering of worlds;

and now the Sabbath comes to us as the weekly commemoration of the best occurrence of time. By it a risen Saviour is evidently set forth the hope of glory. It is evidently a hallowed—a saint's day. One's growth in grace can almost be measured by the mode in which he observes it. When it is carelessly or listlessly kept, we may be sure God's authority is not paramount on other days.

Its bearing even on general morality has never been overestimated. To its careful observance Scotland owes much of its sterling probity, and to its desecration France and Germany, nay even America, much of their infidelity and civil commotion.

But it is especially to the Christian in the interior life of his soul that it becomes a vital question of spiritual progress, how best to consecrate its sacred hours to the service of God, and how most effectually to derive from it such nutrition as will secure the greatest growth in grace. It has truly been said, that our Sabbaths should pre-eminently be "days of the soul's gain, her golden seasons for growing rich in all that constitutes spiritual prosperity; her times for gaining new light to guide the conscience, and fresh strength to invigorate all her religious and moral principles." To this end it is important,

I. THAT WE SHOULD HAVE DEFINITE AND RIGHT VIEWS
AS TO THE SENSE IN WHICH IT IS A DAY OF REST.

Error here will lead to an entire miscalculation and misconduct in our relations thereto. The only sense in which it is anywhere spoken of in Scripture as a rest, is as a cessation from the usual labours of other days. This is described in the commandment as doing "all thy work." It is a holy resting,

"not only abstaining from our own work or labour, but an entering by faith (in the use of appointed means) into the presence and enjoyment of God in Christ as the only rest of our souls." "There remaineth," saith Heb. iv. 9, "a rest to the people of God;" or as the margin literally renders it, "a keeping of the Sabbath." Surely our idea of this is not merely physical repose, but exemption from the cares and labours of this life, that we may have a more positive uninterrupted enjoyment of Christ, and a zealous activity in his praises above. Our Sabbath below is meant to be a foretaste of this. Its suspended work, its contrasted stillness, its peaceful interruption of daily toil, are not to be undervalued. These are delightful circumstances with which God has surrounded it, and which are almost made a part of its essence. But it is not a mere negation, or standing still. Something higher, nobler, and holier than this was intended. It is designed to be a select period of soul-reviving and active culture. With the monotony of secular employ lulled, by its significant stillness, it speaks to us of spiritual wealth for this world, and immortal treasure for the next. It may have its sins of omission as well as of commission. While in common with the brute animal we may rest, with a moral nature above his, we must work, if we would know the most luscious of all refreshment. There surely can be no excuse for the way in which many professing Christians spend its holy hours. Its morning and evening shortened in sleep or sloth, and its intermediate time but half improved! where is the Scripture model or precept for this? Oh! it is for soul recreation as much as for bodily relief; and this does not consist in lethargy, but in those spiritual exercises which, while they do not overtax mere material strength, impart that peace and joy of believing which is the great calm,

the truest serenity, the sweetest repose of the Christian Sabbath. Let us then with earnest longing after this twofold rest, further inquire how we may most profitably spend this sacred day.

II. WE MUST REMEMBER IT—BE MINDFUL OF IT—BE INTENT IN PLAN AND EFFORT TO KEEP IT HOLY.

“There are,” says Fisher, “four reasons annexed to this command—more than to any of the rest, because of the proneness of men to break it, and likewise that the violation of it may be rendered the more inexcusable.” It requires, therefore, on the part of those who would grow in grace, solemn and serious purpose, study, and prayer, to keep it as unto the Lord. We need to remember it before-hand, that all our work may be done in time for us to keep it from its commencement; to remember it during its hours, that we may spend them with greatest advantage to our souls; and afterward, that the world may not take so strong a hold upon us as to prevent our looking forward to it with delight. Definite arrangement must be made that its works of necessity be not those which could easily have been performed at some other time; and that its works of mercy are those which are prompted by our moral natures, not such as mere interest or convenience would suggest. Each Christian should seriously consider the matter for himself, and have such predetermined method of employing his Sabbaths as he may judge will most conduce to the cultivation of grace. A want of system often leads to its unpremeditated neglect. If either by want of care, or habit, we spend it in idleness, instead of a holy day, it will be one of Satan’s holidays, to sport with our souls to their peril.

In prayer and faith we should lay our plans and determine our line of duty, and then, with only such modifications as circumstances may justify, pursue our steady course. In all Christian duties, and perhaps especially in this, our greatest errors are often due to a want of careful remembrance. The means of growth are neglected because not appreciated, and not appreciated because not thoroughly examined. Dulness, carelessness, inattention, indecision, are prominent links in the chain-power of sin. Watch, meditate, consider, choose, take heed, remember, are words used with much force in Scripture in reference to the Christian walk. Christians who investigate the methods of growth in grace, differ much less in their appreciation of them than most suppose. "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,*" and the very act is a step toward the increase of holiness.

III. WE SHOULD AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE DIVEST OURSELVES OF ALL SECULAR CONCERN.

It shows an achievement in grace to be able to forget the cares of the week, and to confine the mind to religious contemplations. This will in part be accomplished by the mode already indicated.

The great reason why we are so prone to secular thoughts and things, is because our minds are too engrossed with the world in daily life. "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also," even on the Sabbath. Ye cannot serve God then, and mammon the rest of the week. It is unreasonable to expect one absorbed with an overplus of business every other day, and who comes to the Sabbath as an overworked labourer to repose, to find in it high spiritual enjoyment. It is impos-

sible to cherish a worldly spirit at all other times, and dismiss it on the Sabbath ; for no day, be it ever so sacred, will keep it from whispering, " When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat?" Hence the propriety of a week day service, and of attention to daily private and social spiritual duties. If our religion is a part of daily experience, it will not be so difficult to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and hear the great voice which can foster our willing attention, and make us close our ears to the voice of earthly " charmers, charming never so wisely." Let daily duty be faithfully performed, and the Sabbath instead of being a novelty, will be a more abundant enjoyment of daily privileges, not an attempted new life, but a more uninterrupted, satisfying relish of the life that now is. If the week is " holy working," it will not be difficult to have the Sabbath a " holy resting," a rest from worldly thoughts, which, besides its spiritual benefits, is itself a refreshment. If whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, we do all to the glory of God, it will in no wise interfere with true success in life, and the Sabbath will be an ordinary daily supply, magnified into a feast. A Sabbath thus properly enjoyed and employed, will prepare us for contact with the temporalities of life, and thus be in turn a cause and effect, enabling us to overcome the world, and delivering us from carnal ambition and desires.

IV. A PART OF THE SABBATH SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO THE HIGHER GRADES OF HOME RELIGIOUS DUTY.

It is a day " for more immediate and special converse with God." The general religious duties of other days are to be

exalted into a higher and nobler spirituality. God has glorified it, and we should glorify it also. It is the weekly *festival* of our religious life, in which we are to partake of the bounties of grace. There is no such thing as being sated here ; for the capacity enlarges with the supply. Of Christ's fulness may we receive, and grace for grace. All time is a trust ; but this is blessed, precious time. It is not to be sinfully wasted, but graciously improved. The Bible should most of all be the Sabbath text-book, and next to it, those works which illustrate it, or are strictly devotional, should be preferred. The wisdom of reading promiscuously good books or religious *news-papers* on the Sabbath, has reasonably been doubted by many. The Gospel, declaring peace on earth and good will to men, may to-day claim our special attention. The Lord delights on his own day to feed us with the "finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock to satisfy us," and thus make "his word the joy and rejoicing of our hearts." In looking at the habits and experience of devoted Christians with whom I have been familiar by biography, or by "their living epistle," I have often noticed how much, especially on the Sabbath, they valued the perusal and study of the Scriptures. It is much to be regretted, even when viewed from the stand-point of self-culture, that the home, Bible and catechetical instruction of children and domestics upon the Sabbath has so much fallen into disuse. More public effort, at best, is only an auxiliary, not a substitute. In these respects it is well to "ask for the old paths and walk therein." When the Christian in the family gathers around him on the Sabbath, for religious instruction, those near to him as inmates of his own household, and attempts to illustrate and enforce the blessed truths of the Gospel, it is time well spent for his own soul.

He himself is better fitted to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of him, and thus find *rest* for the soul. The believer thus ministering in holy things to his own household, becomes as a little child, and learns profitable lessons in grace, from the docility, patience, and simplicity of his endeavours. More extended prayer, self-examination, and religious contemplation are also especially appropriate to this day. It was ordained from Sinai that besides the continual morning and evening sacrifice, a double burnt-offering should be made unto the Lord each Sabbath, and the type is in no way annulled by the greater occasion of the new dispensation. Hallowed time is given for hallowed heart-service. The world is for awhile rolled away, and the soul may well settle its accounts, and in sweet meditation banquet on the hopes of immortality. Our graces may thus flow forth as a river and distil as the dew; and plans and prayers for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in ourselves and the world may well engage our attention. Thus will the Sabbath be to us as a "delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable."

V. A PART OF THE DAY SHOULD BE DEVOTED TO SANCTUARY ENJOYMENTS.

It was when the disciples were *assembled on the first day of the week*, that the risen Jesus stood in their midst and spake peace to their anxious spirits. Thomas was faithless, because he was not there; but the next Sabbath being with them all, in rejoicing faith he could cry out, "My Lord, and my God." It was on the Christian Sabbath when the day of Pentecost was fully come, and the disciples were all with one accord in one place, that they were all filled with the Holy

Ghost. God has ever magnified this as a day for his people to unite in his worship ; and we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, except under a sense of real necessity, and a longing for the courts of the Lord. Yet this is not all the duty of the Sabbath. We are not to attend the public so as to neglect the private exercises of religion. There are other Christian duties to be performed, in order to give power and effect to this. We are not to crowd out those private means of growth which are adapted to increased spirituality. Christian privileges act and react on each other ; and what we want is a symmetrical development of all the riches of the full abundance of grace. When our ideas of Sabbath-keeping consist in church-going, it too often becomes a formal service instead of an outgoing of the soul to God. We may, it is true, with propriety use those means of grace most, which we find most conducive to our spiritual advancement ; and this may, within certain limits, be different in different believers. But private prayer, reading, and meditation on the subject presented in the great congregation, are necessary to support the arch of faith, and to make public ministrations full of comfort and culture. Sustained by these our Sabbath church privileges are a prominent part of its well-ordered, expansive, exalting soul vitality ; a tonic to our graces, and a joy to our hearts. Of public means of grace, as a general power of growth, we shall have occasion to speak more fully in another connection.

VI. A PART OF THE SABBATH MAY PROFITABLY BE EMPLOYED IN DOING SPIRITUAL GOOD TO THE COMMUNITY ABOUT US.

If proper attention to our other soul-interests will permit, there is no better time than this to engage in religious instruc-

tion, to visit for religious conversation, to seek out those who do not attend the service of the sanctuary, and drop a tract or word of exhortation ; and thus endeavour to interest them in the plan of salvation, that they fall not by the way side and perish. Thus true works of mercy will help to crown its sacred hours. Be assured there is no need for the Sabbath to appear a long or tedious day, when there is so much to be done and acquired in it. It must be redeemed from mere bodily ease, and cheerfully occupied in the work of Him whose yoke is easy, and whose service is a rich reward.

They who spend a proper time in the closet, in reading God's word, in attendance on public service, who care for the souls of others, and see well to their own, will have enough to do, and may thus find themselves growing in grace, as each Sabbath brings them a week nearer heaven. If we thus honour God "not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words," we will grow in grace more abundantly than on other days, and be heirs of the promise. "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord ; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father ; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

The day from morn to latest eve
With sacred pleasures twine,
And seek abundance to receive
From treasures divine.
Thus, Lord, our souls by grace prepare
For Sabbath years above,
And let us there for ever share
The Sabbath rest of love.

VII. ATTENDANCE UPON THE PUBLIC AND SOCIAL WEEKLY EXERCISES OF RELIGION, IS A FOURTH MEANS OF GRACE-CULTURE, REQUIRING FOR ITS FULLEST ENJOYMENT A CAREFUL APPRECIATION.

We need no other proof of the importance of these as means of grace than that Christ has appointed his church as his representative in the world, and ordained the preaching of the word as the great instrumentality for the conversion of sinners, and the confirming of saints. Religion has a prominent social element. It moves the soul with those principles of love, which, while they afford comfort in secret, are never content with mere private enjoyment. We need often to meet together to hear of the wonderful things of God, and his doings among the children of men; to join our hearts, and voices, and desires with those of kindred faith, that we may have our graces stirred into greater activity, and our regenerated natures sanctified by contact with the people of God. When the voice of the great congregation ascends to the God of all the earth as the voice of one man, there is a concentration of spiritual power which cannot be measured. It is the grandest and holiest combination of which human intellect and heart, touched by the grace of God, is capable; and grace for grace is the divine result. The power of human sympathy, touched by the sympathy of Jesus, stimulates growth and expansion with a force immeasurable as its author, and the leaven of righteousness imparts a blessed vitality to the mass. Religion, it is true, does not consist in a public attendance upon the means of grace; but it is impossible to imagine a luxuriant growth in grace in one who, with the opportunity, neglects or undervalues this method of nourishment.

Professors of Christianity have exhibited in this respect two extremes; the one in making religion to consist in an outward conformity to the forms of faith, and the other in withdrawing from the world, and relying entirely upon secret experiences. The error of the public formalist is not that he observes public ordinances, but that he substitutes these for the essence and reality of Christian faith. Religion needs its outward ceremonies and observances, just as much as the soul while on earth, needs a body. There are a class of Materialists who would have us believe that the soul itself is neither more nor less than matter, and thus represent human life as in some sort merely a high corporeal development. Precisely corresponding with these in Christian ethics, are those who would make all religion to consist in elaborate forms. Equally erroneous is it to isolate man from his human relations, to make spiritual culture consist in a withdrawment from the world into cells and monasteries, or even to have the idea that our Christianity is merely a secret communion between us and our Maker. Surely it is this, but if real, it will also be more than this. The concealed motives will at times break forth; it will flow forth as a river; it will come gushing out as fed from an unfailing fountain; it will delight itself in the fulness of its source. Sustained by an earnest, interior, spiritual life, the public exercises of religion will open a new direction for grace-expansion, and the two, like double forces in nature, conjoin to keep us in the blessed orbit of grace. It therefore well becomes us to inquire how we shall receive from these the most abundant joy. Let us then carefully notice

VIII. THE PREACHING AND READING OF THE WORD, WITH
ACCOMPANYING PRAYER AND PRAISE, AS A MEANS OF
SOUL-REVIVING.

Ever remember when you come to the house of God that your business is to worship, and to worship Him. A solemn thing is this worship. No vain oblations, no empty sacrifice, no thoughtless presence is acceptable. It is the audience chamber of the King of kings, the High Court of the Judge whose sceptre is justice and mercy, the residence of our ever prevailing Advocate, and the place where the blessed Comforter delights to give us the "oil of gladness." How solemnly beautiful the preparation with which David longed for this "holy habitation!" "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! Blessed are they that dwell in thy house—they go from strength to strength.—I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Ps. lxxxiv. How did the saints of old delight in this temple service! And as the second temple is much more glorious than the first, Christ being himself evidently set forth, with what holy zeal should we join in the service of the sanctuary! Each part and portion thereof is a solemn transaction between man and his Maker. The prayer of the minister is as that of a daysman between us and our Saviour, intended to be the audible voice of his people calling unitedly upon the Lord; the read word is to us a message from the living God, and the voice of praise the commingling thanksgivings and expressions of our souls,—while the explanation and enforcement of Bible truth is intended to educate, strengthen, and confirm us in a life of earnest, holy, spiritual progress. The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; *but to us which*

are saved, it is the *power of God.*" Prayer, and reading God's word, speaking and singing to yourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs!—what privileges more joyfully solemn, and if rightly improved more edifying than these! Prayer and the perusal of Holy Writ we have already noticed; but the song of praise deserves its place with them as an element of grace-culture. In our ordinary reading we are but feebly effected by the holy sublimity of that oriental poetry in which parts of the Scriptures are written. Translation fails to convey the power and pathos of the Hebrew metre and rhythm; and in some instances, as in the Song of Solomon, much of the real beauty and power are marred in the change. Yet those beautiful and expressive versifications which transpose the poetry of the Bible into English verse, stand high in the privileges of devotional culture. Next to prayer and the reading of the word, perhaps no private exercise is more valuable, than the daily reading of those psalms or hymns, which express the doctrines, the duties, the privileges, and the experiences of the believer. When to this are added the power of the human voice cultivated to the notes of spiritual melody, and instrumental aid to magnify the glories of Jehovah, surely we may flourish and grow beneath the fulness of joy, in the sweet harmony of love. We form a clearer conception of the temple service of old, when to the chief musicians David submitted the inspired songs of his deliverance; when Solomon, Ezra, and Habakkuk, furnished the anthems of the church, and the chosen people abounded in grace amid the full toned choruses of the sanctuary. So when, in the worship of a better dispensation, we make melody in our hearts to the Lord, we may still more reasonably expect that his grace will abound unto believers to their upbuilding in holiness.

The entire service we need to approach as an exalted *devotional* exercise. It behooves us, as we enter God's house, to feel that we come on a momentous errand, and by meditation and a few appropriate passages from Holy Writ, so to solemnize our minds as to nurture a frame of spirit favourable to religious impressions. It is well to contemplate the privilege itself; for while multitudes have never listened to the sound of the Gospel, and others are prevented from approach, we may "enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise." Our great aim should be to gain as much present blessing as possible, and to carry home with us such precious reflections, as shall better prepare us for the various duties to which we are called. It is not enough to wait upon God from mere habit, or the force of custom. For while it is well even for our habits to be correct, we each have such a personal and particular errand, that higher and holier influences should pervade our feelings. We have reason at each time to ask ourselves, Wherefore am I come to this house of God? With what motives and desires am I here? It is our right and duty to come, seeking and expecting a blessing. It is a communing with God at his mercy-seat, which on the part of the sincere worshipper is ever acknowledged and responded to by the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

From an analysis of my own experience, and some acquaintance with that of others, I fear that we do not, in this age of the church, receive from the regular public ministrations an amount of spiritual culture, at all commensurate with the power and intention thereof. The preaching of the Gospel, so vast and glorious an instrumentality in the upbuilding of believers in the early history of Christianity, has the same bounteous fulness of nutrition, and is capable of conveying to

us, as through a chief channel, an abundance from the great reservoir of grace. In each of the parts of worship, preaching, reading, praying, singing, the believer bears a personal spiritual relation to the exercise. The rhetoric or elocution of the preacher are not the theme around which centre our interest or emotions, except so far as these serve to fasten our attention upon Christ and his salvation. It is desirable that the highest powers of human logic and eloquence, both as to matter and manner, be employed in behalf of Christianity. But it is far more important that our minds be fixed upon the investigation of spiritual doctrine and duty; that we be educated in the precepts and practice of our religion, and thus "increase with the increase of God." Anything short of this, is a sad mockery of the true intent of the sanctuary. Preaching is only valuable to the believer, as it cultivates the graces of the Spirit, as it illustrates and enforces religious truth, as it increases his faith and knowledge and fits him for a constantly developing experience. It is soul-profit that we are seeking, and the Holy Ghost has been especially vouchsafed to aid us in the attainment. Oh! said a faithful minister, suddenly called to his bed of death, "If I regret anything in my ministerial labours it is that I have spent so much time in elaborating sentences, and have not more simply and naturally presented the plain direct facts of the Gospel." Many a hearer has reason to lament that his spiritual edification, rather than his intellectual entertainment, is not his single object and desire in listening to the exposition of the word.

But our grace-culture is not to be derived from the sermon alone. Said one of another denomination recently to me, "Your people go to church to hear a fine effort, or to criticize; we go to *worship*. With you the preacher is the great attrac-

tion ; with us, the prayers, and praises, and the reading of the Scriptures occupy the more prominent part." The full propriety of the assumption we do not admit ; but it is worth our while to inquire whether we attach sufficient importance to these parts of service. They are all of them an holy offering before the Lord. More than the ancient glory of the tabernacle and the temple surrounds the worship of the Gospel dispensation. Christ having entered in once into the holy place for us, we have a nearness of access more glorious and intimate than was the place of the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant, and the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat. The ninth chapter of Hebrews depicts the glowing contrast. The door to the second tabernacle, the holiest of all, in which the high priest himself entered but once a year, is now wide open by the hand of Jesus. Every part of the service has a direct relation between God and us. The word read at the altar, in the house of the Lord, where he delighteth to dwell and to make known his will through a living ambassador ; the offered prayers of his people joined in supplication, and their songs making melody unto God,—all form a most solemn and impressive part of our approach. We are not merely to listen, but to *unite*. It is a mutual heart-service. It is for the Christian to take part therein. And yet, alas ! how far short we come ! How much we need to be on our guard to make of all these not only means of grace, but means of a new and full supply which shall habitually minister to our increase in holiness. Satan seems here to make his most persistent effort to sow tares with the wheat. Wandering thoughts intrude themselves with singular unfitness and mortifying frequency, during the sacred hour, and the heart too often seems intent on its own devices. Yet we are not to despair. If we only do our part,

the Spirit will help our infirmities, and multiply and magnify the spiritual value of the sanctuary oblation. If impressed by thought and prayer beforehand with the nature and importance of our approach, "keeping our way as we go to the house of God," we will be in a fitting frame to meet Jehovah there, ready to deliver from temptation. If feeling that we are concerned as silent participants in the exercises, yet as those whom God hears always, we shall feel that we have an essential, joyful business on hand, sufficient fully to occupy the time. The Christian idle, vacant, objectless in his attendance, is sure to have his mind the sport of worldly thoughts. But he who enters the sanctuary to worship, "who joins the public prayer," who follows in the reading of the word, and adds his voice or feeling to each couplet of the songs of praise, fills up the measure of grace so well that there is little room for the intrusions of sin. Looking to the blessed Spirit for direction, this method of grace will become more and more spiritually natural, and we will be enabled to feast upon the manna and the fatness of the good things here provided.

In coming down from these heights of privilege, we need also to be careful not to leave behind us the good impressions received. How many of the pious thoughts and longings to which the services have inclined, never come out at the door! It is right to pass the pleasant recognition with a friend, and to have a cheerfulness without levity; but there is a solemnity and propriety in our conduct, as we leave the presence of our Maker in the temple, which is not only becoming, but favourable to permanent good impressions. As we go up imploring for blessing, and while there engage in *worship*, so should we depart, thankful that we have been permitted to meet in the courts of the Lord, and to hear of the things of the kingdom.

Prayer and meditation upon the truths presented should sanctify and improve the service we have enjoyed. Thus shall our waiting upon God in this, one of the prominent ways of his appointment, be as a well-spring of refreshment to the soul, from which shall "flow rivers of living water," that we may "take of the water of life freely." We shall grow in grace thereby.

IX. ANOTHER OF THE PRECIOUS PUBLIC OR SOCIAL EXERCISES OF RELIGION IS THE PRAYER-MEETING.

A name which has about it the very odour of Christianity, and which ought in itself to have a resistless attraction for all the servants of God—

"Oh who that knows the worth of prayer
But wishes to be often there!"

Where would you more naturally expect to find the Christian? The love which he bears to his Saviour, to his neighbour, to himself, and to other saints, all conspire to invite him to the place of social prayer. Earnest closet and private devotions yearn after this, as a kindred yet modified means of progress. It is a favoured locality for grace, a warming place for the renewed heart, a precious opportunity for the *exercise* of that true faith and love, which are ever developed and strengthened by such culture. When together we call upon God for ourselves, our friends, the church, the world, for all the dear interests that circle about the cross, stirring each other's graces by audible and united prayers, and mingling in word, and song, and exhortations, we join like a family group, a household of faith; and there is a unity of desire, and a community of object, highly favourable to ardent and increasing spirituality.

As thus in prayer, and word, and praise, we speak with God and one another, the Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before him for them that fear the Lord, and that thought upon his name ; and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my special treasures.

How reluctantly should the professed disciple be absent from such a privilege ! If we hunger and thirst after righteousness we cannot habitually pass by such a feast and such a fountain. Christ has given it the seal and sanction of his own presence as a privilege associate with the Gospel, and for the confirming of the faith. We need to come together here to seek an antidote for worldly-mindedness, to incite each other to duty, and exchange a God-speed in our Christian course, to use the five talents, or even the one which we are in nowise at liberty to fold away in a napkin, so that unto the Lord at his coming, we may show a gain, a divine progress in the grand accumulations of holiness. Getting rich in grace is the sublimest of all opulence, and here is presented one of its legitimate facilities.

The hardest question which an infidel can ask the Christian is just this : If your Christianity be what you profess it is, why have you not more zeal, more devotedness to the Master's work, more interest in everything spiritual ? Why not more ready to improve every recurring means for growth in grace ? He who is conscious of no prevailing attraction to the place of social prayer, may be sure that his heart is not altogether right before God. But he who loves to meet with the praying circle, because his soul is there refreshed, and his aspirations for holiness enkindled anew, has one of those proofs of his acceptance, which will often come to his rescue in hours of despondency and gloom ; and better than this, will so secure the aid

of the Spirit as to prevent such periods, as to buoy up his hopes and enable him to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh the reason of his hope with meekness and fear. "Nothing but a prayer-meeting." How many a redeemed soul can trace its first religious impressions and convictions to that spot! How many a drooping saint has there had his backsliding checked, and his wavering strength renewed! How many a growing Christian has here been nourished on such additional supply of food as has made his vitality more vigorous, and the fruits of the Spirit more exceedingly abundant. Such ones are not willing to be absent; surely those less zealously affected cannot afford to be.

A well sustained prayer-meeting is a most important auxiliary to the preaching of the Gospel. It becomes all those accessible to such means of grace to improve them for the soul's advantage, and those who are not, to combine in some way with their pious neighbours and friends for at least occasional social worship. How sad that prayer-meetings should ever languish for want of Christian support! It is due to the church to which you belong; to its other members who have claims upon your co-operation; to your neighbours and friends who need your prayers; and, most of all, to your own soul, that it may be nurtured by all the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that you should employ and enjoy so prominent an instrumentality for spiritual edification. Be thus established in the faith. Put on the whole armour of God, and even here on earth, victory will perch on the banner of him whose watchword is "onward, and upward in grace." The hosts encamped against holiness will flee ere we besiege them; for the Lord our God discomfith them.

"If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing

that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," seems to be a promise given especially to encourage the hearts of true disciples, as they meet in this social way, for mutual prayer, reading, exhortation, and the voice of sacred song. Through all the history of the church, God has often graciously owned this as a power of progress in reviving, nourishing, and sanctifying his people.

Neglect not then, ye redeemed of the Lord, this method of his grace. Be at the place of prayer. The new convert feels it a precious spot; and we must not forget our first love. The first glow of grace is ever nurtured where Christ is in the midst, and we are warmed by contact with the flame of love which other hearts may cherish. Let no insufficient excuse debar the soul from the delights which surround so humble an offering. He giveth more grace, he giveth his Spirit without measure, to them that ask it. But we must seek it in all the ways of his appointment, and meet our God wherever he rejoices to meet his people. Thus shall our souls be as a watered garden; our graces shall grow as trees by the water-courses; and going on from strength to strength, we shall appear at last, every one of us, in Zion before God.

X. THE BIBLE-CLASS AS AN ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE-CULTURE IS TOO GENERALLY NEGLECTED BY THE PRO-FESSED DISCIPLES OF CHRIST.

We have already had occasion to speak of the reading of the Bible as a means of spiritual growth. But besides that perusal and study which, with the help of commentaries and explana-

tious, we may pursue at home, there are additional benefits to be derived from its study in connection with others. An interest is excited, and often trains of thought are suggested by the contact of different minds, which elicit important truths. It is a means of grace not to be left alone for the young, or those who have never made a profession of faith. We enter the school of Christ as learners. Knowledge is the third acquirement mentioned in the scale of religious increase. All along our course we are to view ourselves as scholars needing to be educated in the divine life, and requiring all these additional helps to a right understanding of the text-book of spiritual accumulation. The style of preaching of the present day, is so little explanatory, that there is especial need thus to enable all to become more learned and mighty in the Scriptures. Christians of all ages should never deem it beneath them to receive instruction in this way. Take up thus the parables, or the miracles of Jesus, or a single Gospel or Epistle, and with earnest study and prayer, a new light breaks in upon the soul, reflected from one to another, until Christian hearts mutually participate in the grace-strengthening enjoyment thus received. Those intelligent in other things are often quite deficient in Bible knowledge. It is as babes in spiritual things that we first enter the kingdom, and we cannot be too anxious to obtain information as to fundamental doctrines and duties. While prayer, and the Spirit, and self-assistance are important adjuvants, this kind of culture must be obtained by the use of all the means. Many excellent Christians have testified what a new interest and zeal has been infused into their Christian life by this kind of discipline—the truth being thus spiritually discerned, and the words of wisdom more fully understood, melting and moving the heart. Bible study is so prominent a part

of the life-work of the Christian, that in common with other important methods of growth, it needs a special exercise devoted thereto. The minister of Christ, or those who, as experienced believers, have come to appreciate the blessing of this culture, may herein prove serviceable to others, and thus all together grow in that knowledge which is synonymous to growth in grace. In this study of the word, we are ever to remember that its prominent interest to us is not as a mere book of morals, as a system of law, as a history, or any such like, however acceptable it may be in these respects. These are only important as the incidental proofs of its correctness. It is as developing the mutual relations of God to man; as exhibiting the source, the evil, and the remedy of sin; as showing how you, lost by nature, are redeemed by grace; as pointing to the richness and fulness of Christ to the believer, and the means by which he may go on from strength to strength, that it is ever to be examined by the true disciple. With this aim impressed on the heart, its social and more public study in the Bible-class will afford new scope for faith, and gratitude, and love; and thus we "gather fruit to eternal life."

XI. IN THE SABBATH-SCHOOL INSTRUCTION OF THE YOUNG,
MANY CHRISTIANS MAY ENJOY ANOTHER METHOD OF
GIVING EXERCISE, AND IN CONSEQUENCE, A DEVELOPMENT
AND INCREASE TO SPIRITUAL GRACES.

We are too apt to confine our ideas of the advantage of such efforts to the scholar. But this is a contracted view. The teacher taught is the infallible blessing of those who are faithful in this vocation. Were there no other argument for such labours of love, the benefits accruing to ourselves would

be sufficient. An interest thus manifested in the child, and an effort to train it up in the knowledge of Christ, cannot but meet with the divine benediction, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Engaging in such a duty with prayer and proper previous study, we are brought in contact with the doctrines of Christianity, in their simplicity and beauty ; and often in our attempts to make them plain to tender minds, behold them in a sweetness and glory, never experienced before. There is something so Christ-like in such an endeavour to do good, that the God of grace not only enables us often to see the fruits in others, but to come back with rejoicing, bearing the sheaves with us into our own garner of heart-culture. This method of caring for the souls of others has become so prominent and recognized a part of our work for God, that it is well for us therein to be looking after profit to our own souls, to be inquiring whether in it we may not find a new sphere for personal progress in holiness, a new occasion for manifest advance in the divine life. I have never known a backsliding or careless Christian deeply interested in the spiritual education of children. I have known many others who have found it a well of refreshment to their own spirits, a fountain of accumulating grace. If duty calls, or privilege permits, neglect not this humble work ; join with others ; or seek out from the neglected ones a little class of your own ; and that God who rewardeth abundantly will add grace to grace and cause your profiting to appear. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these ? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my Lambs." "Whosoever shall give to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

CHAPTER VII.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

THE SACRAMENTS.

GOD has not only given us his visible church as the type of his salvation and of the church triumphant in heaven, but has also appointed therewith such sacramental ordinances as tend to strengthen the faith, and develope the Christian virtues of his people. They are for our *sanctification*, not only signs, but substance; food and stimulus for vitalizing and fructifying implanted graces. Although emblems, they are not shadows; but are able to nurture us in true wisdom, and not only seal us unto the day of redemption, but make us meet for the inheritance of the saints. As gifts are not only the tokens of friendship, but aid to cement it; so these bind us more closely to Christ, and make us more fully the partakers of his benefits. By special appointment they stand out from the other means of grace, as the great signal marks of salvation, as the affixed seals of that covenant whose provisions are "abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness," and in the end eternal life.

Considering first the Lord's Supper, let us inquire why and how these are to be prominent means of growth in holiness

"The worthy receivers," says our Catechism, "feed upon Christ, and are made partakers to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace." "It is not a converting but a nourishing ordinance;" a true grace-culture. When our Saviour was about to finish the work of our redemption, and go to be our Advocate on high, it was eminently gracious and befitting that he should appoint a Christian festival in memory of the event, not as a part of the work of redemption, but as gloriously commemorative thereof; having in it for the soul all that refreshment, and nurture, which the ancient supper, as the chief meal, had for the sustenance and invigoration of the body. This feast, together with the gift of the Spirit as an abiding Comforter, was the *Fare Well* token of a love as intense, expansive, and exhaustless as the author. It would be strange if in it there should not be a means of increasing grace commensurate with its holy significance. It is the special appointment of the Holy Supper, to keep us *mindful* of grace in its central idea, its culminating point, its sublimest development. That Centre to which all else that is merciful in the moral universe culminates, and that grace which is the fulness of God in very deed, come down to dwell with men, is here evidently set forth by appointed symbols.

It is important that the Christian should come up to this feast of dedication, of perfected sacrifice, of full redemption, with adequate views of the banquet it provides—with exalted ideas of the fulness he should hope to receive therefrom. Thoughtful prospects, anticipated joys, careful calculations as to what we may reasonably seek in such a service as this, enlarge our capacity for reception, and this is all that is needed. The manna is all provided. "The Spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him

that is athirst come." The intelligent faith-exercising desire is enough. Grace never leaves such a heart unsupplied. It will flow in as a river, and this is its full tide. If we only have the will and desire, the fountain will give an abundant supply. In no ordinance does Christ come nearer to his people than in this. It is even a higher spiritual exercise than prayer, the nearest approach to the purchased inheritance, to be had this side of heaven. We are not only brought nigh by the blood of Christ, but our Saviour comes to sup with us. It is when the King banquets with us, that he inquires again and again, "What is thy petition, and it shall be granted thee?" It is the high day of the Christian's life. How then shall we most fitly partake of its growth-accelerating fulness?

I. WE MUST COME THERETO WITH SPECIAL PREVIOUS PREPARATION.

We must have the wedding garment on, and oil in lamps already trimmed. It will not do to postpone the arrangement, or the perusal of our consciences, to the time at the table. These hearts are too deceitful, and too desperately wicked, even after grace has entered them, to make their reading so short and simple a matter. Our great business, when at the feast, is not self-examination or preparation; but a readiness to enjoy it, and to recognize Christ as present with us; to partake of the fruits of benefits before secured, and to feel the joy and peace of believing in him, who has thus in condescending love invited us. It is a solemn covenant needing well to be considered before each renewal; a sacrament, an oath, to be duly weighed ere it is re-affirmed. In order to be prepared, we need,

1st. Special prayer, humiliation, and seeking of the Spirit's presence.

2d. A careful review of our progress in holiness since the last stated interview at the table.

3d. A consideration of the intimate relationship between Christ and the believer signified in the ordinance.

In still more immediate approach seek

(a.) To come with reliant faith.

(b.) To come with enlarged anticipations and expecting great blessing.

(c.) To come feeling what it is to be *redeemed*.

At the table three points may be especially prominent in our thoughts "in remembrance of Him."

(d.) Who redeemed you.

(e.) The price it cost.

(f.) The mercy and love displayed.

The abiding result brought with us from this table of privilege should be

(g.) A grateful sense of the goodness of God, manifested by constant thanksgiving and devotion.

(h.) Increased strength for all grace-nourishing exercises.

(i.) Re-consecrated effort to "increase the fruits of righteousness" and "abound in every good work."

1. First then, Oh sincere seeker of the guest-chamber! to prayer, humiliation, and seeking of the Spirit. Extraordinary entertainments, set privileges, royal love, always bespeak especial efforts. God must be zealously inquired of by the house of Israel, his chosen people, when they would most profitably delight in him. Therefore, pray. "Before honour is humility," and as we would meet Christ here in his low estate

of humiliation, in order to be made partakers of his exaltation, our lowliness should seek to be as abased as was his condescension. Therefore be humble.

For soul-festivity, a double portion of the Spirit is our grand necessity, and he giveth liberally to them that ask it. Here we come to see ourselves as sinners, and self-reliance has no place. Our sense of our absolute need of the aid of the Spirit, makes us imploringly earnest in our petition for it. Such conditions are the first steps toward a prepared frame of mind. Meditation and the closet, are the forces with which to prevail; for thus the Spirit's fulness will be gained.

2. *A careful review of our progress in holiness since the last stated interview at the table.*

These communing seasons are divisions in spiritual life, shining way-marks, by which to compute the rapidity and certainty of our advance. It is not the design of preparation for the supper, to seek merely to satisfy ourselves that we are Christians. It is sorrowful enough that any should need at such time to institute such inquiry. But the rule of our faith is rather that leaving these first principles of our profession, we should see whether we are going on unto perfection. We should not be so much under the necessity of reviewing the accounts of past years, as of examining our feelings and conduct since the last social interchange, and see whether the proofs of increasing affection again entitle us to this social recognition.

Do we hate and abhor sin when we detect it in our hearts more than ever before?

Do the mercy and the love of Christ appear more attractive?

Does gratitude to God for spiritual and temporal mercies increase?

Do the Bible and its reading appear more precious?

Is prayer becoming more and more a privilege, as well as a duty?

Do we increasingly "love the brethren," because they bear this name?

Do we look more earnestly, affectionately, and submissively to God as our Father, to Christ as our Redeemer, and to the Holy Spirit as our Comforter?

Are the means of grace more highly valued?

Do we seek and study by right worship, right feeling, and right action, to grow in grace?

Do we increasingly feel that "the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever?"

Is our religion more and more accurately the balance-wheel in the machinery of life, the regulating power in our existence?

It is by no means difficult for the earnest growing Christian, to determine such inquiries. It is with some, alas! difficult, because it is hard to find what there is not; and the true believer may be for a time, by reason of the infirmities of sin, as one dead. If the review is at all satisfactory, thank God, and take courage for new growth and triumphs in grace. If not, then surely there is call for repentance, and for all those spiritual exercises, which test and develope the inclinations of the renewed soul.

3. *A consideration of the intimate relationship between Christ and the believer signified in the ordinance is an important preparation to growth thereby.*

We call it the sacred-remembrancer, the sacrament, the supper; but better than all, the communion, the endearing union of the saint with his Saviour. We are to sit down at our Father's table. Children once lost in the wilderness of sin, we have come out to the well-watered plains of grace, and now

catch glimpses of our Father's house, behold the table spread, behold the welcome smile ; ah ! more, for all things are ready ; he bids us receive the cup of blessing, and the broken bread, as the communion of the blood and body of Christ. As prodigals once having forfeited any right, we return by the privilege of invited guests. God welcomes us to his presence, and makes our reverence and holy fear not means of constraint, but helps to adoring love. In order that our joy and peace may be sweet, intimate, soul-filling, it must be mutual. On our Saviour's part, there is an overflowing of affection. He is of God made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. We must prepare to enter with zeal into the relationship. There must be a reciprocal outgoing of our implanted graces, that thus we may show forth his death till he comes. Half-heartedness will not do. On the other side it is a feast at the cost of a self-sacrifice ; on ours it must be whole-souled. Our desires should be unto God in his fulness ; for we are so near as to touch the hem of his garment, to feel his hand, hear his voice, and receive his grace. It seems to me we never by any type, come so near our Saviour, as we should in this ordinance. It is the highest seal of relationship he has set upon us, and the most joyful public recognition of our union with him. Here at the foot of the cross, he shows the Christian his crown. Oh ! my soul, prepare thyself to understand what it is thus to know thy Redeemer here, and what it will be to dwell forever with him hereafter. Come hungry to the feast ; for only the hungry doth he fill with goodness. Come thirsty, for it is a " fountain of the water of life " to him that is athirst.

It is the marriage of the Lamb. The believer is as the spouse " to the chiefest among ten thousand, and the one

altogether lovely." The welcome is boundless, the relationship intimate.

(a.) *In our more immediate approach, we must come with a prepared reliant faith.*

This is the last place for faithlessness. Our belief should be tested and exercised beforehand. It is the place for the luxury, not for the trial of faith. Be not faithless, but believing.

If we are constant in spiritual reliance and duty, alive in our devotions, watchful over our belief and practice, in the intervals between these occasions, we shall have already on the "breastplate of faith," and approach not so much for examination as recreation. Self-examination is rather the intermediate than the main duty at the table. It is sad to be in doubt as to our right and invitation at the moment of the banquet. If you have doubted your faith once at the communion season, by the grace of God resolve to test it to the uttermost, so as again to come up to a precious privilege, rather than to a doubtful duty. Unbelief is never so intrusive as when left for a conflict at such a time. The correct idea as to the need of preparation for this ordinance is sometimes a source of error. Scrutiny of self is postponed to this, as if it were the set time to meet Satan rather than our Saviour. Our true right, rather, is to come confirmed, trusting, full of faith, as children who have an assured confidence. It is well indeed to consider the foundation and essence of our trust, but this not so much for the purpose of finding out just at the time whether we are believers, as that we may see wherein we have come short, what our occasions are for humility, gratitude, and joy, and especially that we may know whether we are growing in grace and abounding in fruit. See to it then that faith is in lively exercise, "entering into that within the veil" here rent in twain,

that we may see Jesus our High Priest, our Sacrifice, our Redeemer, who ever liveth to make intercession for us; our Immanuel, a God with us at his own table.

(b.) *We must come with enlarged anticipations, expecting great blessings.*

It is a place where we meet our Saviour and God, under the most favourable circumstances. It is by distinction His feast, the only one prepared for saints below. Rest assured, the Master thereof will see to it that spiritual benefits are not lacking. The soul's most sacred memorial day will not be wanting in its love-tokens. At its first institution the words of Jesus were the language of unlimited abundance. A blessing, a full and free invitation, and the song of praise beckon us to high hopes and full anticipations. Here he is sure to give without measure to them that ask. I am more and more sure that Christians, while waiting before God in his ordinances, obtain all the spiritual blessings they seek in faith. These are promised us without limitation. It is not presumption to come expecting choice nourishment here, but rather proof that we trust and rejoice in the Author of the feast. There is sweet importunity in the invitation. We must enlarge our hearts to receive the fulness of his remembered love; we must open our ears to hear the ever new song of completed redemption; and we must be ready with the eyes of spiritual discernment to behold the supplies of his grace.

This is a time for a fuller realization of the blessings of the new covenant. Here we find Christ as the expectation and desire of our souls, as able, ready, waiting, to build us up in his own secured grace. Our hopes and our longings for increased holiness shall not be in vain. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." The sincere act of remembrance

entered upon with enlarged expectant confidence is accepted in place of our offering, Christ having offered himself for us. At his own table, "shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Divine exhaustlessness here provides this solemn festival for refreshment. With expansive zeal and hope, may we look forward to the great day of the Christian feast. While others starve because they will not come, let us see to it that we starve not at the feast for want of spiritual capacity, from contracted views of what is to be expected at such a jubilee of grace. Our anticipations have a basis as limitless as the cordiality of him who invites us, and a prospect as glorious as the grace of which we speak.

(c.) *It is important to come feeling what it is to be redeemed.*

So far even as our personal advantage is concerned, the blessed event we are preparing to celebrate commemorates a marvellous deliverance. The misery of our lost estate was one of unutterable anguish. We were without God and without hope in the world. A representative had once been appointed for us, not one of like passions with ourselves, but the most perfect specimen of humanity that the Creator could make with his own image as the model. His position was amidst a complete supply of all needed good, endless variety, luxuriant abundance, exhaustless provision, with but one reserve, and that as little as a test could be. Methinks Satan alone of all the universe, could with a shadow of reason complain of unfairness. If partiality was shown it was all upon our side. Yet sin, with its enormity thus magnified, entered by human choice, and with it, sorrow, rebellion, suffering, and death. The covenant of works is broken. Our own voluntary transgressions endorse the original sin. Not only lost by such inexcusable wickedness, but so senseless to our condition as to make little

effort to escape, we have earned the wages, and these are eternal burnings. "Oh! what eternal horrors hang around the second death."

But behold! a deliverer is at hand. The offended Judge—the just God, the despised King, the abused Father, the great Jehovah, has purposes of mercy still. The lost can be found by the great Shepherd; the prodigal in his rags can be welcomed back; the soul can be lifted from a horrible pit and a miry clay; the "ransomed of the Lord may return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." A Saviour, a Substitute, is provided, and the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to assist us. The criminal can come forth from his dungeon, not only pardoned, but admitted to commune with the King. The covenant of grace is more glorious than the covenant of works could have been, if unbroken. The exaltation is greater than the fall. We have become by purchase heirs of the grace of life, and are soon to sit down at the table which witnesses our restored sonship, our complete adoption. "Who am I, O Lord God, that thou hast brought me hitherto." Surely we have reason to come up to the feast, considering what it is thus to be redeemed and exalted. Once hopelessly the sons of Belial, but behold "Beloved now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Does not the meditation of what it is to be redeemed prompt to a growth in holiness amidst these sacred privileges?

(d.) *While present at the table, consider who it is that thus redeems you.*

It is Christ the only begotten of the Father, "full of grace and truth." Not an equal exalting himself by our exaltation; for he was already high and lifted up; not at first one of our number, sympathizing as sharer in our humiliation, but in amazing condescension coming down to dwell with man—to bear in his own body the penalty of sin. A voluntary sufferer for his enemies was our Redeemer, an unasked Saviour was our Rescuer, and yet rejection was his chief salutation. He must needs buy the privilege of doing us infinite favour, and accomplish it by means of the wrath of those he came to save. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself."

It is the beloved Son of God, become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. "The delight," says Edwards, "of all parents in all children from the foundation of the world to the end of time, if put together, would be infinitely less than the delight of the Almighty Father in his Son." Yet the Father to save us, and the Son to be our Redeemer, unite in the stupendous, self-denying work of our redemption. The honour, the grace, the blessing, are magnified by the contemplation of the Author. "Consider the Apostle and High-Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to him that appointed him," with whom we especially, in this ordinance, are made partakers, "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The institution of this sacrament has direct reference to Christ as our Redeemer, a sacrifice for our sins. We may indulge holy joy, in view of such a ransom. Besides, he is thus made our Leader, the Captain of our salvation, our anointed Priest and King, our Advocate and Intercessor, our Forerunner for us entered into heaven, our Immanuel, our dearest and most distinguished Friend.

“Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power
That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore.
All are too mean to speak His worth,
Too mean to set my Saviour forth.”

“Christ is all in all, for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” Such is He who redeems us; and as we thus behold him, we may be more and more conformed to his likeness.

(e.) *Now remember the price this redemption cost.*

We commemorate in this ordinance not only a wondrous deliverance, by an infinite Friend, but one purchased at an infinite cost. It was not a mere exercise of benevolence and love, a mere determination of the will, that perfected the plan of salvation. The price highest beyond all calculation which a man can give for anything, is excruciating suffering. This multiplied by the penalty of all sin, and by the capacity of infinite sensibility, is the ransom paid for us. Our first representative had the trial of his faith in a Paradise, our second, in the wilderness. Our first with but one temptation, ate forbidden fruit, after feeding upon luxurious abundance; our second, when hungered by long fasting, tempted to presumption, and offered the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, resisted all. Our first Adam, from nothing, exalted to be a man in the image of God, sustained not the dignity of his creation; our second, from an infinite exaltation, debased, buffeted, forsaken, was faithful to Him that appointed Him. Justice required an infinite expense of humiliation and suffering, and the full wages of sin, such as only our Saviour could discharge. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting

ing life." "Christ also has loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God." We may carry still further the idea expressed by President Edwards, and say that the love of all parents for all children from the foundation of the world to the end of time, if put together, would be infinitely less than the displayed love of Christ for thee, O Christian! "Ye are bought with a price." "For ye were redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ." "Though rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." Although independently, ineffably happy, he became the embodiment of suffering. His undisturbed infinity of wisdom, power and glory he leaves, to endure for us all the curse of sin. "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us."

None but he can pay the debt we owe, and he with not a whit less of self-denial and sacrifice. Being reviled, he blessed; being persecuted, he suffered; being defamed, he entreated. The manger, the temptation, the baptism, his poverty, his wanderings, his rejection even by the chosen people of God, the betrayal, the exceeding sorrowfulness, the soul-agony, the arrest, the mock-trial, the spittings and buffetings, the imprisonment, the scourging, and smiting, the scarlet robe, the crown of thorns, the reed for a sceptre, and all the mimicry of kingship, the way to Golgotha, the toil up Calvary, the crucifixion, the malefactor's death, all tell us, as much as finite humanity aided by faith can comprehend, how precious is our redemption! But then we cannot see the heaven-start of this humiliation; the glory from which this was the condescension, the infinite majesty from which this was the degradation, the Almighty from which this was the submission. We see only in part. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. But

we are in this Communion to show forth his death till he come, to reckon as far as we can the value of our privilege by its cost, to feel with full hearts the riches of the purchased inheritance, and feeding on its opulence to grow in grace. Count well then the cost, compute the perfected sacrifice, that you may sit and adore such immeasurable love. Ought we not by such contemplations to grow in grace?

(f.) *With right views of what it is to be redeemed, of the one who redeems us, and the price it cost, the soul is readily inclined to gather strength and rejoicing from the mercy and love displayed.*

When did a prophet ever foretell, and accomplish by his own suffering, redemption for those who laughed him to scorn; or a high priest suffer as a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of a people reviling him; or a king die for a nation of rebels because he loved them? Yet how immeasurably beyond all comparison is the mercy of Jesus! The human prince may at length half-willingly submit to death, worn out by the ingratitude and persecution of his subjects; but man's rebellion, so far as God in Christ was concerned, was but a mote on the sun-beam of his unextinguishable glory. Still he abode the Prince of peace. No exhausted patience, no external pressure, no possible necessity, brought about our salvation. It was mercy in its intensity, mercy in its self-denial, mercy not only in habit but in exercise, mercy in its heavenly purity, mercy itself self-existent in the Saviour and displayed for us. This table is to us a prepared mercy-seat. His thoughts and purposes of mercy to us in our lost estate are here shown forth, and we are made partakers of the blessed result.

"God is love," and John repeats it, "God is love." Other passages of Scripture describe and illustrate this love, but this

is the condensed expression, the affection characterized as far as human symbols can express it.

So with the *Communion*. Our common mercies and other spiritual blessings are sweet, and pleasant ; but this is love, the concentrated essence, the central emblem, the cross crowned. As bread and wine are the insignia of abundance, so this is the harvest and vintage time for the soul, for enjoyment and nourishment both, for increase of grace and growth in holiness ; a time to gather fruit unto eternal life. O my soul, enlarge thyself in contemplation and desire ! Beseech the Spirit to take of this mercy and love, and so show it unto thee that it may be spiritually discerned. Remember, be *mindful* of this supply. In this ordinance "follow on to know the Lord." Christ and his people meet to celebrate and enjoy the triumphs of salvation. Re-light thy graces by this flame of love. Awaken thy heart to this new anthem of mercy. Pray with zeal and faith revived by such feasting, and rejoice with new desire after holiness.

(g.) *But as we go down from this height of privilege, we must remember also to bear away with us grateful, abiding impressions of this goodness, if we would grow thereby.*

We may not remain at this communion long, but we must seek to come away with our faces shining with the glory the Lord has shown us, and our hearts glowing with the sense of his loving-kindness.

Before, and at the table we have *recounted* the mercies of God, and singled out this crowning victory of love, and thus are in fitting frame to obtain the permanent, indelible stamp of affection. Like the prolonged notes of a grand solemn oratorio, this voice of the Messiah speaking in the ordinance, should touch the key note in our heart's "harmony of grace,"

and keep it sweetly vibrating with gratitude. Thanksgiving must be our prolonged, cultivated experience. But this is ill-sustained without devotion. We must betake us to the closet. The Holy Spirit and prayer, are the fastening points for every good feeling and desire. Without these, the idea of permanent religious impression is but the "baseless fabric of a vision;" with them we shall not fail to secure that grateful sense of the goodness of God which, nurtured by the provisions of his table, will extend itself throughout intermediate days, till we come to sit down with Jesus and his saints, in the place he has gone to prepare for us.

(h.) *It becomes us also to return from the feast with increased strength for all grace-nourishing exercises.*

It is the delightful peculiarity of the means of grace that they develope, assist, and sustain each other; each flowing on in its own well ordered channel, yet by outlets and inlets joined to each other, until at last made one in the abundance of Christ, they together flow into the one ocean of grace made glory.

Here we have waited before the Lord at his table. It requires attainments in grace to enable us to feed rightly and fully upon this spiritual provision, and we should look for progress at each successive period. But besides this, as we go on from one degree of grace to another, we shall find through this ordinance increased force for other aids to grace-expansion. We are not to be content to return to other sources of nourishment, in precisely the same attitude as before we came to the banquet.

Repentance has felt new occasion for humble gratitude in view of a purchased pardon; faith has received new confirmation, and with a firmer hand may lay hold on all the public and private ordinances of religion, while the manifold assu-

rances which these sacred symbols affirm and convey, afford new incitements to faithfulness in the discharge of every Christian duty. Gracious inducements persuade us to be faithful to him who hath called us. New aspirations after holiness, prompt to a more diligent use of appointed means. The invigorated soul feels the force of the more frequent methods which have been appointed for its spiritual development. This derived strength is to be taken not only for our comfort, but that it may infuse itself into the less intimate, yet unspeakably precious communings of daily life, and may make us ever anxious to be more affected and profited by our more constant soul-refreshing exercises. Remember as you resume the other Christian privileges, that you go with a new seal, and pledge, and proof, that even in them he is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

(i.) *We must secure a growth in grace by departing from our Lord's Supper with re-consecrated effort, to increase the fruits of righteousness and to abound in every good word and work.*

The inner grace-progress must have its development. The Communion as a pledge and a privilege, a memorial and a refreshment, presents to us the most affecting persuasion to a high order of holiness. If there is one spot pre-eminent above all others in which we should be presumed to receive a power and progression heavenward, it is here. As we behold all these things: the once hopeless condition of man, the love of God, the price paid, the redemption purchased, the victory won, and ourselves made partakers, and now permitted to sit down at the social board, as fellow citizens with the saints and of the house-

hold of God, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? What motives inciting us to be faithful to him who hath called us, and to bring forth fruit? Then when from this seat we view those yet strangers to the covenant of promise, perishing for lack of this knowledge, what an argument for increase in holiness, without which we cannot abound in the work of the Lord, and do good to them as we ought! But the service is not only a motive, but a *power*. In it there is a dispensation of grace. We not only receive strength from contemplation, but the Holy Spirit is ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God, and this is a set time to have conferred upon us especial ability for grace-progress. Permanent emoluments are to be secured if we wait as the faithful. Thus encouraged by the most lively incentives on the one hand, and aided by adequate power on the other, what is wanting to impress us with the settled conviction that we are to live and work out a Christian life, in full, earnest re-dedication of ourselves to God as in a joyful service? The communion, though a spiritual, is a practical ordinance; and we must magnify and keep it, by going forth awakened to new zeal, as those whose captivity is turned, joyfully weeping, yet bearing precious seeds, and doubtless to return again bringing *sheaves* with them.

By this grace assisting, I must bear much fruit; I will care more for my own soul and the souls of others. I will consider religion the chief concern, and not only admit it in my reason, and at the table, but act it in my life. A great work of grace is as yet unfinished in my own soul, and a world lieth in wickedness about me. For myself I will use the means of growth I enjoy, and will, when opportunity permits, speak to my neighbour with whom I have so often talked about other things

as to the welfare of his soul, that both may receive a blessing; he of grace, and I a growth in grace. I will enter upon new plans for doing good, or pursue former ones more efficiently. Looking to Jesus, I will abound in every good word and work. Such should be our re-consecration, as we pass from the refreshment to the sweet toil of the Christian's vocation, and thus making increase in holiness we shall go on unto eternal life.

Pause, O my soul! and pray and ponder upon this sacred theme! let memory linger over these sacred emblems! and though language is all too poor to tell the richness and the fulness of their grace, strive to have that experience of them, which feels and knows the luxury of their spiritual increase.

II. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER, ALTHOUGH IN COMMON THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, HAVE NOT PRECISELY THE SAME RELATION TO OUR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS, AND ARE NOT EQUALLY FOR OUR GROWTH IN HOLINESS.

"The communion," says our Larger Catechism, "is to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and *growth* in him." "Baptism," however, "is a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ," rather than primarily a grace-growing ordinance. Hence it was proper that in this connection the former should receive our first consideration. But baptism also has in it culture and incentive to a life of expansive, faith-abiding spirituality. Its rarity is of itself an element in its solemnity and power. But once in a life-time do we for ourselves pass under this almighty signature. It is God's seal which he has given permission should be used by those who

have believed, or whose parents are his chosen seed. As by it we are introduced into the family of Christ, in the benefits which flow from such exaltation and association, new means of growth are secured. It presents to us additional motives "to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body."

There are two circumstances in which the Christian may have personal relation to this sacrament, in each of which it is well to seek for materials of spiritual strength and refreshment.

I. WHEN IN CONNEXION WITH OUR PUBLIC ADMISSION TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, WE EITHER RECEIVE THIS SIGN, OR BY THE ACT OF PROFESSION RATIFY AND REDEEM THE COVENANT OF A PIOUS PARENTAGE.

As each believer for himself receives or ratifies this seal of dedication, he comes out from the world, and in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, declares the great business of his future life to be to grow in holiness. It is a solemn covenant between God and man, for our spiritual edification. God condescends to admit us into the family of his chosen people, and to give us the blessing of the true Israelite, and we bind ourselves to prove worthy of this heirship to which we are hereby entitled. Thus as the servants of God we receive the mark in our foreheads, and are set apart as a peculiar people *zealous* of good works. Though but once sealed with the seal, as often as others are admitted as members with us by public profession, our own plighted vows are brought to remembrance; and on such occasions, we should by

this ordinance stimulate our graces, and feel that in it we have by divine aid secured to us a power of progress in the ways of salvation.

In four particulars should we make this covenanting for ourselves a means of growth in grace.

1. *It should be an occasion of abundant gratitude to God that he has thus distinguished us, and of his own good pleasure chosen us to everlasting life.*

“Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” We need often to recur to the deliverance of which this is the signet, and to the adoption into the family of Christ, of which this is the authorized rite. How great the mercy of God, that while we were yet children he claimed us as his own, and sealed us by an holy parentage! Or if we are now receiving for ourselves the ordinance, how great should be our gratitude that provision is made for the stranger, that the wild olive may be grafted on the true vine, that the alien to the commonwealth of Israel may be brought in! It is grace, free grace, that has thus made us to differ, and we ought to be able more intensely to appreciate the blessing, because we have thus been singled out, because it is an uncommon bestowment, not only not conferred from desert, but in the very midst of manifold ill-desert. Often should we recall to our hearts what it is to be baptized into the faith of Jesus, and thus awaken ourselves to that abundant increase which an appreciation of obligation cannot fail to enhance.

2. *A sense of the high responsibility now assumed, should incite us to higher attainments.*

As we remember the seal of our adoption, we should hear a voice crying unto us, “Thou art the Lord’s.” Our very speech should bewray us. Our lives should testify for us. To attain

lofty things, our mark must be high. The standard must be raised aloft, the eye of faith must be kept upon it. We were baptized into his resurrection, as well as into his death, and our aspirations must be as lofty as our hopes. I fear we too seldom consider the weighty obligations under which our baptismal vows place us, and what a means of growth in grace it would be to us, if we were more constantly mindful of our covenant obligations. All honorable men find it their interest to fulfil their agreements with each other. How much more important to fulfil our agreement with God. How great the inducement so to do, when the contract is all in our favour, and its fulfilment fraught with endless opulence ! Grace-wealth is the blessed, unfailing reward.

3. *Baptism aids growth in grace because it brings us within the pale of the promises which, by the authority of God, are confirmed to the baptized believer.*

Oh ! what encouragements are these to the Lord's chosen, sprinkled as they are like strings of pearl upon the pages of the divine word. How terrible to those out of the ark ! for abundant in fulness though they be, they are no refuge for those in the deluge without, no light to those who still sit in the region and shadow of death ; but rather make the storm more terrific, and the darkness more palpable. But the baptized disciple can claim them as his own. This is the sign manual of relationship. It is no small exercise in the plan of grace. As to privileges and benefits it has all the significance in the new dispensation that circumcision had in the old. The washing with water is pointedly employed to signify the cleansing from sin. The call to Saul was, " Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In the ark few, that is, eight souls were saved by water ; of which

Peter says, "The like figure whereunto baptism does also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Though not faith, it is its appointed sign, and our very title-deed stamp to the promises. Through it our heirship is symbolized, and these blessed assurances are opened to us as a fountain for continual refreshment. They are for each of us as much as if there were no other mortal in the universe. They are made over to us as the emerald and sapphire foundations of the Christian hope. Are you perplexed with doubts? are you troubled by fears? are you discouraged by the assaults of temptation? are besetting sins strong and intrusive? are the affections too cold? Is faith wavering? is love inadequate? are afflictions many? is there anything which seriously impedes your growth in grace? Baptism is the seal of that adoption which makes us sons of God, and we have all the encouragement to work on and grow on, which such a relationship justifies. Faith has a sure foundation, and "he hath anointed us, and hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Our heirship to the promises is established, "Herein is the Father glorified that ye bear much fruit." "I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."

4. *Baptism is not only a pledging of ourselves to be the Lord's, but it brings God in covenant relations with us.*

Glorious contract—it pledges him to be ours! He is brought into agreement with us, and we are made partakers of the riches of his grace. The power of God not only to salvation, but sanctification is thus made over and secured to us, and "he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ our Saviour."

is, so to speak, fastened to us in a covenant ordered in all things and sure. Hence in effort to make increase in holiness we are no longer dependent upon the weakness of our own resolves, but have the strength of the triune God plighted on our side. A favourable alliance has been entered into with our sovereign Lord, and the Spirit is conferred to enable us to avail ourselves of the benefits. It is to "signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace." As pledging ourselves, we have made a good dedication; as pledging Jehovah we have secured an eternal life-right to go on accumulating *grace*. What more joyous encouragement do we need than this of the Godhead *engaged* on our side? Whenever we behold the ordinance administered, how should it remind us of its intent and scope, and impart new faith and courage in our power by such grace conferred and certified to be "cleansed with the washing of water," so that more and more purified, we may at last be presented before Christ not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish before him in love!

II. THE OTHER CONNECTION OF BAPTISM WITH US AS A MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE, TO WHICH REFERENCE HAS BEEN MADE, IS IN ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OUR CHILDREN.

Do we properly appreciate the privilege of dedicating our offspring to God, and understand how much we may make it the means of spiritual advance to our own souls, as well as to those committed to our care? There are not wanting examples in holy writ where God made the faithful dedication of the child a means of grace to the parent, and where, on the other hand, he punished

with spiritual dearth his own chosen seed for neglect of this consecration. The child Samuel, brought up to the house of the Lord in Shiloh for consecration, was a blessed means of grace-growth to Hannah and her husband ; and it was when all the children of Israel were circumcised by Joshua, that the Lord said unto him, " This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you," wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal.

The importance attached to circumcision under the old economy, was not an adherence to a mere form. It was intended to be a blessing both to parent and child. A similar dedication was never abrogated by the new. It is the public index of family religion. As death is Satan's witness, and claims even the child for its trophy, so baptism is Christ's witness and marks even the infant with the insignia of a Saviour's triumph.

(a.) *Imploring God's favour upon our children on the ground of a covenant of faith entered into by ourselves, it not only consecrates them, but reconsecrates ourselves, to the service of our Redeemer.*

The very relation in which it places both us and them is a grace-exercise. Our vows for them are the vows of a Christian parent, who in the very act declares a faith exhilarating to his own soul-vitality, exhibiting a reliance full and implicit enough to reach to his seed after him. It is putting the family in communication with Jehovah. Why not expect that along such a line of love the grace of God should more freely be transmitted to us? There is always danger with any ceremony so seldom executed, that by its rarity the nourishment may be forgotten, or else seem to degenerate into an ephemeral thing. But not so with the trusting Christian pa-

rent. He may go to God exercising more abundantly the grace within him, because his children are included in the covenant, because he may pray for them as heirs of the promise, and use this as an argument for their personal ratification of the treaty which their federal head has made for them.

(b.) *The moral character of the child has an important bearing upon the grace-growth of the parent.*

The sons of Eli were a sad drawback on his spiritual delights, and the rebellious sons of David marred the progress of his reign. More than once have I seen pious parents retarded in their spiritual advance by the unrecognized influence of their children, leading them to relax their discipline, to conform to the amusements of the world, and with it relaxing their own earnestness and devotion in their heavenly Father's service. It is a means of backsliding in grace more potent and prevalent than is generally recognized, and must be especially so to those who have in no wise consecrated their little ones to God. The right training of the child for heaven, is one of the most solemn and difficult duties of life. It is eminently proper that for it, even on our own account, we should have a special act in the Christian ritual.

(c.) *It is a comforting source of grace-culture to ourselves to know that in it we may have the treaty, pledge, and divine aid of God; and may look forward to our sons and daughters as helps to our holiness, as blessings to the church of Christ, as parts of our means of doing good, and as stars in the crown of our rejoicing hereafter.*

Under the burden of such a charge, we may well cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But when Christ by special provision becomes our covenant helper, we ourselves are more nearly joined to him, and partake more plenteously

of the abundance of his grace. Our own growth in holiness is thus deeply concerned in the matter, and it behooves us to use and magnify this means for the furtherance of our faith and progress, lest on the other hand our children, undistinguished from the ungodly, shall remain where their parents leave them, and tempt us to loiter in the paths of righteousness.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

SYSTEMATIC BENEVOLENCE—THE STUDY OF CHRIST IN HIS OFFICES, TEACHINGS, AND EXAMPLE—THE STUDY OF THE LIVES OF MEN EMINENT FOR PIETY.

SYSTEMATIC benevolence, as a means of grace-culture may next occupy our attention. It has to do with the vitality of our spiritual natures, and the development of Christian experience in a way and to an extent too feebly appreciated by many professors. The grace of giving is a great one. In the estimation of the believer, so far from being an imposed burden, it should be a precious privilege. It is an *act and part of worship*, as well as prayer and praise. Abraham, the recognized head of the ancient church, gave to the King of Peace tithes of all he possessed. In the Jewish ritual, as a part of holy service, each one gave the first fruit both of field and flock, and the poor received beside the gleanings of the harvest. The Levites had their tithes by specific law. In addition there were other stated and occasional gifts and sacrificial offerings, so that the devout Jew devoted nearly one-third of his income to religious purposes.

Systematic benevolence entered as a law, and permeated as a principle, the whole history of the ancient church. The

Gospel dispensation, while altering somewhat the method, expands its scope, and magnifies its importance. The increased plainness of this Gospel, the declared mode in which it is to be disseminated; the destiny of mankind without it; the sentiments of Christian love which, in the light of this perfected salvation, regard every human being as a brother; and the work which has been done, and is doing, through God's blessing, on the offerings of his people; all establish and enforce the duty of Christian beneficence.

But passing these as only incidental to our special theme, systematic benevolence is to be considered one of the most important means of educating our souls for immortality. The vow of Jacob, "Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee," was no small element in the grace-culture of Bethel. Gold and frankincense and myrrh, the riches of the East offered with their worship, were gifts from the Magi worthy of the coming and kingdom of the promised Messiah. In the sermon on the mount it is associated with prayer in the directions, as to the modes of exercising it. "Thou, when thou doest thine alms" is just as much taken for granted, as a part of spiritual exercise, as even secret prayer. Pentecost without its charity would have been lacking one thing. Alms-giving has its indispensable place among the means of grace-culture. No wonder that the ancients called it "one of the wings of prayer."

In fact the most important view we can take of systematic beneficence, is as a means of progress in grace. It were easy for God to convert the nations by other means, "but he throws on us his poor for the purpose of enriching us." "Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you." Even the apostate Julian noticed the effect and said,

"Nothing has so much contributed to the progress of these Christians as their charity." It is as a *source of* growth in grace, that alms-giving is chiefly referred to in the Scriptures. It has been truthfully said, "that when the poor Christians at Jerusalem were in great suffering, and the apostles solicited relief of Gentile churches, their inspired letters sent here and there, contained no rhetorical painting of the distresses to be relieved. In this work they seem to be labouring with an eye to the sanctification of Christians of whom they asked relief." Notice the ground of the appeal made to the church at Corinth, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. * * * And God is able to make all grace abound toward *you*, that *ye* always having all sufficiency in all things may abound to every good work—and increase the fruits of *your righteousness*." To the Philippians Paul by the Spirit says, "Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account." It is for their enriching in grace that he asks it. "As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also."

The description of Cornelius as a devout man, and the reason given for his special spiritual blessing, is a significant one: "A devout man and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always." The angel of God coming to him said, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a *memorial* before God." Shall not we secure such a memorial on high, and thus abound in the wealth of grace. The gold of the rich and the mites of the poor have to do with the grace-culture of the soul. While God deigns to use what we return to him for the advancement of his king-

dom in the world, its greater benefit is the grace he gives us in return. So much for the commands and examples of God's word. But here as elsewhere, reason comes to the support of faith and revelation. Benevolence may readily be seen to be a means of growth in holiness.

1. Because it is in direct contrast and antagonism to the great obstacle to spiritual progress. Selfishness is the reigning principle of sin, benevolence is the germ, and growth, and glory of redemption. "All that I have is mine," is the feeling of the natural heart, even in giving. "All that I have is thine," is the grateful expression of the renewed soul in its first experience of the peace of God.

"Evil affections are best displaced by bringing in their opposites." An indwelling system of beneficence is the specific antidote to the ruling passion of our human natures. Worldliness as the great method of selfishness, has ever been the bane of the church, and the natural exhibition of the enmity of the heart toward God. How the world in a thousand ways, independent of its spiritual bearings, presses itself upon the renewed man! How its secularities intrude upon sacred hours! How the love of its money, its reputation, its pageantry, its enjoyments, lure the soul from the centre of true bliss! But introduce this principle of stewardship. Learn the lesson that we are to give cheerfully of our substance to the Lord, that we are workers in his vineyard, with talents of money, of ability, of influence to be dispensed, and to be accounted for at last, and the Christian life has infused into it a new principle of action. What a check upon the natural fondness for worldly acquirements to feel it a privilege to draw therefrom freely for the service of their Master! Gold and the Gospel have a relationship made sacred and joyous by the growth in

grace, which may accrue to the liberal believer. The gift conferred, is reflected back in rays of light and love upon the hearty giver. Abounding in this grace, spiritual thrift is the result. He who devotes a set portion of his earnings to charitable purposes, not as a mere formalist, or that he may have praise of men, but as an acknowledgement of his indebtedness to the Giver of every good, and as an offering for the welfare of Christ's kingdom, combats the Spirit of worldliness from a most favourable point. He holds in one hand the smooth stones with which to slay a Goliath, and in the other the palm branch of victory over world-love; and his triumph is a growth in holiness as important as the immortal interests involved. I know of no way in which the Christian can better learn to recognize the true value of earthly things, and turn its secular interests to account in the attainment of holiness. It is the surest way in which to overcome the chief assault of the adversary, and this repelled, accumulation in grace becomes the ready work of the renewed soul.

2. While crucifying inordinate worldliness, it gives exercise to a principle of love which cannot but bring forth the fruits of personal holiness.

So long as any one grace is folded in a napkin, or hidden in the earth, there cannot be a symmetrical development of Christian character. There will be a dwarfed limb, a paralyzed member, not only useless itself, but detracting from the beauty and power of the rest. Exercise is a necessity for healthful grace-culture. Whatever tends to draw out its higher attributes, tends also to the advance of the possessor in holiness. There is in the religion we profess a principle of human love, which demands this continued benevolence, in order that grace may have its legitimate expansion. Every principle of our redeemed

natures prompts to a disposition to extend to others the blessings we have received. This alone involves the necessity of cheerful self-denial in the use of the property and powers with which Providence has invested us. Gratitude to God, and a desire for his glory in the salvation of souls, incite to the same devotion of a portion of our increase to his service. That love is meagre, stinted, inefficient, which does not go out of self, and dispense to those spiritually needy. "Freely ye have received, freely give," is a motto representative of grace, not to be unheeded without doing violence to spiritual charity. It is at the same time the recognized way in which we are to show our love of Jesus. In the exercise of Christian beneficence, we in one act fulfil the two tables of the Decalogue; and *in religion, doing duty cheerfully from the heart, is a bearing of fruit*. That the employment of this function of love is a growth in holiness, is evident in the very conscience of the believer. In the very gift he sees the reason of his Saviour's welcome. "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. * * Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!" God sanctifies such offerings by his own special favour. Even though the effort fail of success, the reflex blessing belongs to the giver, and is not to be measured by the condition or profit of the recipient. Its holy light falls back in mellow rays upon his own soul, and he expands beneath the tonic self-sustaining power. The Christian, therefore, cannot afford to withhold his offering, for by it he looses a spiritual reward. As the living tree must unfold its buds and foliage, in order to growth, so the Christian must spread out his foliage of love, that he may bear fruit unto eternal life. He who thus gives as a privilege to himself, as

well as from a desire to benefit others, is not annoyed by frequent demands upon his liberality. If they are within the sphere of duty, they will be cheerfully met—if not, the refusal will be with feelings of regret, not of annoyance. Thus in the recognition of systematic benevolence, as one of the streams by which our graces are to flow forth, new benefits of grace will be returned, laden with the riches of a heavenly Father's blessing. "The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Love to God supreme, and love to his neighbour as himself, conjointly find appropriate expression in this one grateful principle of action. The Christian giver becomes himself the centre in which these affections meet, and his moral nature rising on such wings is borne along the joyous heights of prayer, and purity, and praise. Let the true believer magnify this as one of his prominent means of personal growth in holiness. This he will not fail to do, if he gives it the consideration it deserves.

3. This benevolence is a means of growth in grace, because a source of spiritual satisfaction and happiness. In the very act we may feel the joy of a conquest over an easily besetting sin. The world is so far, at least, put under the feet. A higher object in the acquirement of money is recognized than self-use or aggrandizement. The selfish quails before the unselfish, and there is enjoyment in such a victory. There is the luxury of self-denying love.

To be in the world and kept from its evil, looking upon the earth as the vestibule of eternity, valuable only in its bearings thereupon, and looking upon ourselves as stewards of the manifold grace of God, there is the happiness of spiritual nobility, the satisfaction of recognizing the true glory of existence. The giving of our substance for religious purposes as an act of

worship, admirably cultivates this feeling. = Even our secular concerns become a source of sanctified improvement. We obtain from the employments of daily life that holy comfort which proves a growth in grace indeed. Thus by a set act, our religious relationship declares itself amidst every day duties, and this is one of the very highest achievements in grace-culture. The luxury of a good investment spiritually, is above all other monied pleasures incomparable. It is being rich toward God, which will be most valuable, when the earth and all that is therein shall be burned up. Such a use of our means for God and in his service is the only kind of satisfaction we can derive from money, at all akin to that of the "joy and peace of believing." If you have a lingering doubt of the reality, necessity, and pleasure of this as a means of growth in holiness, test it by your own experience. Abundant are the examples afforded by the lives of good men, who have found it a source of nourishment to their souls; and among them all, none were ever known to lament their having given too freely. On the other hand, multitudes have had occasion to bless God that he has owned and prospered their offerings, and returned them with the blessed exchange of abundant grace.

This spirit of beneficence must be esteemed a privilege; not a mere constraint or conscientious goading, but the free-will sacrifice of a heart warmed with the love of Christ and souls, the outglowing of a flame of grace, already alive in the heart.

It must also be systematic, because thus only can it come to be regarded as a part of a regular holy life.

It keeps a grace in exercise, and as selfishness, and the world, and the temptations to withhold are ever at hand, it brings the remedy in frequent antagonism to the disease. If we give only as

moved by spasmodic feelings, pathetic appeals, or extraordinary distresses, we cannot expect the abiding benefits of an indwelling grace. But if we "lay by in store as God has prospered us," at weekly or other frequent stated intervals, as indicated by the Scripture rule of beneficence, we secure the permanent results of a regularly dispensed method of nourishment. Our time, our talents, our influence, must also, if needs be, accompany our money. Most of all, we must sanctify it by prayer. The increase is of God, and for the benefit to our own souls we are to look to him. Like those of Cornelius, our prayers and alms together must make up our *memorial*, must ascend to return again in showers of grace to refresh our own thirsty souls. Thus shall we verify in our own increase the opinion of Edwards, that it is the "foremost external duty in placing us in the path for spiritual blessings and for the influences of God's Spirit in the heart, in divine discoveries and spiritual consolations." As you value the fruits of righteousness, as you desire to abound in the true riches, neglect not thus to add to the sweet and satisfying delights of holiness.

I. THE FREQUENT CONTEMPLATION OF CHRIST IN HIS OFFICES, HIS TEACHINGS, AND EXAMPLE, COMMENDS ITSELF TO EVERY CHRISTIAN HEART AS ANOTHER OF THE METHODS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPEMENT.

It is only as we are more and more conformed to his likeness, that we come nearer to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. To know the mind of Christ, is the main attainment of sanctification. With what minute-

ness, fidelity, and enthusiasm, does the painter or sculptor study the works of the old masters. How, absorbed in contemplation, do they visit and revisit the galleries of art, and hour after hour, during successive years, seek the inspiration of genius from these human models. It is the glory of our religion that it provides us a perfect pattern, a mould of character without a blemish or a stain. The most cultivated heathen have attributed crimes to the chief of their divinities, and the authors of false religions have been in their personal characters imperfect illustrations of the code of morals which they themselves have instituted. But how different with our divine Exemplar! His was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person: he was made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. "He loved righteousness and hated iniquity." "The Captain of our salvation is perfect through suffering, that both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified may all be one." "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps."

His work of redemption, combining God and man in the most sublime of undertakings, he discharged with loving fidelity and unmarred perfection. As a prophet, he fulfilled in his own person all the difficult glories and combinations which ancient seers had predicted as the proof of his divinity, and himself foretold the great events of the new dispensation. As a priest he died for the sins of his people, himself the perfected offering; and "having entered in once, into the holy place, he has obtained eternal redemption, and appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." "He hath an unchangeable priesthood and is able also to save them to the *uttermost* that

come unto God by him." "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh, and having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."

As our King, he is the King of glory, the Prince of the kings of the earth, and hath made us kings and priests unto God. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and of its increase shall be no end. Ye are heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised for them that love him. How soul-inspiring, and soul-reviving, such contemplations! It were well for each to construct for himself from holy Writ, an alphabet of the names of Jesus, as he is therein made known to us; and so to make each of them a theme of prayerful study, as more copiously to measure their fulness. From creation to the cradle, from the cradle to the cross, from the cross to the crown, the lustre of a sinless purity and a perfect love mantles his blessed life; and now, redemption purchased, salvation won, his last office-work is for our growth in holiness. He ever liveth to make intercession for us, our Advocate on high.

And what teachings were the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth! Holy Scripture, we have reason to believe, has furnished us but a small portion of his earthly, yet divine, utterances; but a full abundance we have in these to give refreshment to the longing soul, and nutrition for the growing body of spiritual strength. Diametrically opposed as they were, to all preconceived laws of precedent, or practice, and what is more, diametrically opposed to every principle and feeling of our fallen human natures, they yet come to us with so much of the innate royalty of truth, as to bear conviction to

the conscience, the understanding, and the heart. The officers when called to an account before the chief priests and Pharisees, "Why have ye not brought him," answered, "Never man spake like this man." Herod, and Pilate, besought by all Jerusalem to crucify him, each is forced to testify, "I find no fault in this man." Never were precepts inculcated, or instructions given, that pandered less to the popular taste, or less accorded with the frailties and fallacies of humanity; and yet, they stand the only lasting monument of truth, illustrated and enforced by its living embodiment. Were religion an empty fable, we could not part with his teachings from the codes of public government, or the rules of private action. If such be the admissions and testimony of the world, what should be the feelings of the redeemed soul? "For we are made partakers of Christ." To us these teachings come as the sweet language of our Saviour's love. "They are messages of grace for our growth into this likeness; Gospels and Epistles for us who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." In them we find the vitalizing air of Christian life, and from them breathe the deep, full inspirations of soul-expanding grace.

But still more the teaching is made practical by the example. It is not a bold and tenable theory, a sublime principle, merely, that is before us; but the speaking life of a holy model. The voice of the leader is, "Follow me." We have not to tread the billows alone, or walk upon an untried sea. Our Saviour has stilled the waves for us, or is ready to hold us up amidst their surges. Growth in grace is not an attempt to advance without a guide amidst the jungles of an untried wilderness. The light of the Sun of Righteousness beams upon every part, and every part has been pressed by the footsteps of the Son of

God. He took upon himself our natures, that he might in all things, save sin, be made conformable to us that we might have hope through him. He was in prosperity and adversity, in peace and temptation, in joy and sorrow, in life and death, in trial and triumph, in every position in which the God-man could be placed, that we might not be left without a prototype. Have we not sublime inducement and example to encourage our holiness? It was not enough that by a perfect life he should exemplify the virtues which adorn and illustrate the Christian course. Amidst the gloom and darkness of his last hours, the light of a holy being is made perfect through suffering. Forbearance, humility, meekness, forgiveness, submission, love are taught in his death, as his life alone could not teach them. His intercessions were but the touching prelude to the continued intercessions he has gone to make for us on high. To show the fulness of his mercy, as his last act, he carries the soul of a pardoned criminal with him to Paradise.

The mind and the words of Jesus, illustrated and enforced by the power of his example, present such incentives to growth in grace as to deserve to be a prominent theme of every day examination. To be more and more like Christ, this is the mark of the prize; this is the summit of true ambition, this the sublime effort of the soul advancing in holiness. As we cannot associate with those about us, without deriving from them shades of character, so we cannot familiarize ourselves with this image without catching some of its precious rays. Study the example of Christ on earth, as it shows what the ground of a firm faith is, as it exhibits the mould of a sanctified life, as it fulfils prophecy, as it works out that grandest and most difficult problem of all eternity, how God can be just and yet

the justifier of him that believeth; and thus as branches nourished by the true vine, ye shall grow in likeness to him, and your fruit unto endless life be as the grapes of Eshcol. May God enable each one of us who have named the name of Christ to seek for his likeness, to enter into active sympathy with his life, and so to be joined to him by the imitation of his human nature as to grow up into him who is the head in all things. "For we are made partakers of Christ; wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the apostle and high priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. Seeing that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession and come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; and "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" looking unto Jesus.

II. BESIDES THIS LIFE OF CHRIST AS CONDUCTIVE TO OUR GROWTH IN GRACE, THE STUDY OF THE CHARACTERS OF BIBLE SAINTS AND OF THOSE OF LATER TIMES, WHO BY A GODLY WALK AND CONVERSATION HAVE ADORNED THE GOSPEL, IS EMINENTLY CONDUCTIVE TO THE SAME RESULT.

The holy men of old, even in sacred writ, are not presented to us perfect. They were men of like passions as ourselves, subject to the same infirmities of sin which trouble us, and overcoming the world and the wicked one by the very weapons placed at our disposal. They were not as those who had already

attained, but with Christ as the mark, were pressing on. In no case is any stress laid upon any natural amiability, but they are represented as sinners, weeping over their faults and shortcomings, humbling themselves before God, obeying him, and by faith trusting alone in the merits and righteousness of Christ both for the experience and fruits of salvation. Christian, art thou doing this same thing? It seems in fact as if there was a great design in the variety of Christians presented to our view in Bible history. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Job, David, Daniel, had each his marked points of individual character; and these served to illustrate the power of faith and religion acting upon diversified human natures. The impetuous Peter, the doubting Didymus, the just James, the bold Paul, had their evil passions and propensities, as well as we; but sin was quickly followed by full contrition of heart. They all considered their Christian profession as a warfare between corrupt carnal nature, and the grace of God within them. Their effort was to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that God would work in them to will and to do of his own good pleasure. Hence, though chief among sinners, they became chief among saints. Their effort was to grow—not only to acquire the necessities, but the beauties of holiness. The earnest Paul, the beloved John, the repenting publican Matthew, and the host of early Christians changed by the power of the faith of Jesus, were fed from the same granary at which the Christian of to-day is a welcome applicant; and though our names may not be as eminent in the history of the Church militant, yet by inner growth in holiness, we may follow on to know the Lord, and sit beside them in heavenly places in the Church triumphant.

Beside all these, the pages of history and of more recent

biography furnish us with examples of the grace-culture of the saints, by actual experience summoning us to zeal in striving for spiritual attainments. They live in heaven, and they live on earth, proofs of what the grace of God implanted and cultured in the heart, has done with indwelling sin ; how it has helped the renewed soul to contend with the hosts of Abaddon, to come off more than conqueror against every assault, to sustain itself in going on from strength to strength until those using the means have "purchased to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." As we read the lives and works of good men, or of their attainments in holiness, Satan's device is to suggest one of two ideas : either that they were naturally of mild and admirable dispositions, or that they enjoyed peculiar advantages, and that these are only the favoured few, to command our respect, rather than excite our imitation. But to correct the error, turn at once to the testimony of biography. The holy grace-abounding Bunyan, unconverted, might well style himself, as he did, the very chief of sinners. "The evil propensities of his heart led him to be the ring-leader of youth in every kind of profaneness and excess. In riper years, a dissolute woman reproved him for his swearing, because in it he so far exceeded all men she had ever heard." He followed the bent of a bad nature, until a treatise on the love of Jesus was the medium of light to his soul. Once converted, the Bible became his text-book and companion, Christ, and the lives of martyred saints, his holy exemplars ; and by a life of devotion to the interest of his soul, he became a growing, ever-brightening Christian, until the lusts of the flesh, the pride of the eye, and the pride of life were brought under by the conquests of holiness. Baxter, in one of the works of his advanced years, expresses his convic-

tion of the amount of inherent wickedness to be found even in good men, only to be mastered by growing in grace by the use of appointed means. Medley, the gay and profane midshipman, wounded in the sea battle, is compelled to remain for a time at the house of a Christian, and beholds the way of salvation. With earnest zeal he becomes a preacher of the word, his natural disposition subdued by the power of an endless life. "Awake, my soul, in joyful lays," was the hymn he wrote to express his gratitude to God; and when, after nearly thirty years of faithful labour, he came to the door of the tomb with his eye fixed on heaven, "Ah!" said he, "dying, dying! sweet work, sweet work!" and went to be for ever with his Lord. "Oh death, where is thy sting, oh grave, where is thy victory!"

John Newton, of reckless disposition, once rioting in excess, and engaged in the horrors of the slave trade, renewed by the grace of God, brought under control the evil propensities of his heart, and advanced steadily by the use of the appointed means from one degree of grace to another. In the Olney hymns, we find the breathings of a soul struggling with sin, and panting after greater holiness. In his *Cardiphonia*, or "Voices of the Heart," we see "the wild beast on the coast of Africa whom the Lord caught and tamed," as he used to call himself, transformed into a true follower of the meek and lowly Jesus.

Of Dr. Watts, Johnson in his appreciative notice says, "By his natural temper he was quick of resentment, yet, in practice, he was gentle, modest, and inoffensive." The irritable youth became the sweet and lovely singer of the gospel Israel, and though once ungovernable in his propensities, a model of childlike tenderness; as genial as the divine songs with which he enriched the church and the world. The names of Gardiner,

Hale, Edwards, Payson, Alexander, and of multitudes besides, might be adduced, to show that attainments in grace are dependent upon something besides the bias of the heart. In the study of their lives and works, we may discern how, and why, they grew in grace. Read "Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners," or, Baxter's "Narrative of the most memorable Passages of his Life and Times," or, "Payson's Diary," or any such recorded experience of eminent saints, and it is not difficult to trace the streams of their nourishment.

They looked not upon their conversion as the completed work of grace in the soul. They found no select and royal road to heaven, adapted only to the favoured few. In the valley of humiliation, they mourned over besetting sins. They prayed mightily to God, they studied the word, they enjoyed the ordinances, they went about doing good, they made advance in holiness their great business. They grew in grace, because they used the means to grow, diligently seeking for greater conformity to Christ. Often under apparently unfavourable circumstances, they kept up communion with the Father of our spirits. The weapons of their warfare were not carnal, but mighty through God. Just the same weapons are ever in the armory of grace for each of us, if we will take and use them. It is thus that their lives studied in their spiritual experiences may be to us a means of growth in holiness. In varied phases and from different stand-points, they show the practical details of the Christian life; how we, as they, may mortify the flesh and crucify the darling sins, and abound in the fruits meet for repentance. "Go thou and do likewise;" learn from sweet experience their trials and their triumphs. With Christ as the perfect pattern on which oftenest rests the eye of faith, these may aid in guiding us, till we arrive at the New Jerusalem

above, and sit down with these saints made perfect in glory, for ever to magnify and adore him who has left us an example that we should follow his steps. In studying the character of Christ, and the lives of eminent saints, there is indeed noble encouragement to growth in holiness.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

SELF-EXAMINATION—FASTING.

I. SELF-EXAMINATION AS A MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

“Know thyself,” was the earnest maxim of a heathen philosopher. How much more should it be the effort of a Christian saint. We need scarcely to adduce the testimony of God’s word to convince us that self-examination holds an important place among the means for our growth in holiness. He would be a careless, and in all probability an unsuccessful merchant-man, who did not keep a watchful eye to his accounts of loss and gain. No less unfortunate is that Christian, who in the business of his soul’s eternity, forgets or neglects to make his frequent reckonings. Studious acquaintance with whatever we undertake, is a most important element in every vocation in life. But when we turn to spiritual concerns, the principle is multiplied and magnified by all the higher motives of an everlasting welfare. Yet to know one’s self is not an easy task. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Our motives and actions, our reasonings and emotions, our impulses and reflections, are so dependent upon circumstances, that they need our constant scrutiny. Yet such vigilance alone

can deliver us from the power of that evil one, who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The word of God and the testimony of Christian experience have therefore united in regarding it as one of the indispensable ordeals of our faith, and through God's blessing, a means of spiritual purification and culture. It will not then, we trust, be unprofitable for us to inquire how we shall engage in an honest and decisive self-scrutiny, in such a way as to promote our upbuilding in the grace of the Gospel.

1. We must have correct views of the standard of our faith, and the example for our comparison.

Blessed be God, in the Bible as our inspired guide-book, and in Christ as the true Pattern, we have both the standard of faith and practice. The fundamental doctrines of religion are plainly announced and elucidated, and the principles and acts of a holy life are set forth by a living example. Those who are on the search for mysteries, and curiosities of reasoning, may there find something to perplex ; but they who desire the sincere milk of the word to grow thereby, are not apt to miss it. Instead of a catalogue of rules and by-laws to meet every possible contingency, which never could have been acquired by the memory of the most profound student, we have broad foundation principles of action, which are not hard to be understood by those faithfully employing the means of grace. Although the Christian is nowhere represented as a perfect man, from the precepts, doctrines, and examples of the word we obtain such a clue to character and conduct as makes it easy for us to pass judgment upon others, and ought to make us still more intelligent in passing judgment upon ourselves. The intimate acquaintance with the word of God and the example of Christ, upon which we have already insisted, is rendered doubly im-

portant, when we view them as the tests of our own spirituality.

2. Much depends upon the spirit in which we enter upon this investigation.

If the true seed of righteousness has never been planted in the heart, or if it has become so choked with tares as to be rendered unfruitful, it will be hard to find satisfactory evidence of advance in holiness. He who is in such a case, will only be successful by earnestly resolving, by the help of God, to make faithful work in breaking up anew the fallow ground. If spiritual vanity or false security predominates, we will go at the work as did the Pharisee, who examined himself as to the number of his public prayers, his fasts, and the munificence of his legal gifts ; but overlooked the heart in its relation to the acts.

If on the other hand we set about it with an undue depreciation of self, looking only through the ground-glass of human understanding, comparing ourselves with ourselves, like the anatomist of morbid specimens, overlooking the implanted physiology of life, we will have no rays of light to distinguish the true from the false, and no rays of warmth to revive the languishing soul. It was said of Alexander the Great, that he could mount his noble war-horse Bucephalus only when he turned his eyes to the sun ; for in any other position he was frightened at his own shadow. It is only when looking to Jesus, as the author of our righteousness, that we can leave behind us the dust of sin, and mount as on eagle's wings toward the attainments of holiness ; that instead of seeing the shadow of self, we can discern Christ the substance.

3. Definite and exalted views of what it is to be a Christian are essential in order to correct scrutiny of self.

With a right standard, it is possible to have our view thereof contracted, our own spiritual vision indistinct, or in some way defective. We need enlarged conceptions, full anticipations, if we would grow in grace by this method of circumspection. The doctrines of the Gospel in something of their fulness must be appreciated, as they only can be by studious devotion; and the practical details, which make up the luxuries of a holy life, must even before their attainment seem so desirable, as to allure the soul to a longing for this higher spiritual state. The sublime contrast between the heart unregenerate by nature and sanctified by grace, between the life of sin and the life which is by faith upon the Son of God, between being sons of wrath and becoming heirs of Christ, must be investigated with the zeal of a new existence. It is a great thing to be a Christian—a solemn warfare of the spirit against the flesh; and it is only by a somewhat adequate conception of the undertaken work, that we can grasp the guaranties of its accomplishment. Its very magnitude will excite; it cannot discourage; for, blessed be God, the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God. If we take our own hearts to task, and go at the work in a mere inquisitive or intellectual way, we shall commit one of two grave errors; we shall either in the pride of self-confidence deceive ourselves as to their real condition; or else, beholding so much that is unsatisfactory, become involved and bewildered in the attempt, and grow hardened by repeated failure. But if, on the other hand, impressed with the consciousness that there is a height to be attained, a growth to be secured, a triumph after the trial; that God is on our side to bring us off conquerors, there is no such word as despair on the sign-board to immortality. Its index-finger is that of our Saviour; and following it, we are in the straight way

of eternal life. The clear and exalted view, is the presage of victory. Intelligent conceptions of the desirableness of advance, of the posts which as Christians we occupy, of the victory which overcometh, will make us on the alert as the watch-guards to the portals of our own hearts. Thus impressed, we inaugurate and instate Christian scrutiny on a correct basis.

4. Self-examination must be frequent.

The review of accumulated accounts long unadjusted, is by a very law of our nature always irksome. In the affairs of this life, system is never dilatory, never allows matters easily disposed of from day to day to gather in masses until formidable from mere quantity. Still more, if we would be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, we must be diligent in this business of self-examination, in the sense of attending to it often. Keeping account with the heart, is keeping account with one's self; no kind of reckoning requires, in order to accuracy, such circumspection as this. Besides, in dealing with ourselves, we have heavy margins to balance, intricate unravellings to make, apparent discrepencies to explain.

The first impress of the image of God, its strange defacement by sin with its blurs and blots, its suspicious pencilings, and its varied shadings, and then the restoration of the first likeness, more glorious with Christ as the regenerator, give us such a commingling of the divine and human, such intertwinings of the spiritual and carnal, such blendings of grace with fallen but sanctified humanity, as require systematic and oft repeated methods of testing. And here is just where the error of many a Christian lies. He passes along without earnest self-review, in the routine of his daily life, until perhaps a communion season reminds him that he is about to testify his love, and renew his covenant. Then the work of self-exami-

nation is attempted. Too often, alas! it proves a failure, not only not accelerating advance in grace, but leaving the soul unsatisfied as to the genuineness of its hope, detracting rather than adding to the joy of the commemorative ordinance. When the Apostle directs the Corinthians in connexion with the communion, "Let a man examine himself," it must be remembered, that in all probability in the early Church the Lord's Supper was celebrated more frequently than is usual now, perhaps on each Sabbath. And besides, the same apostle in his next letter to the same church, makes the command a general law for the culture of spiritual faith. A few moments at the close of each day, spent in an inquiry into its failings and its fruits, tends to that self-acquaintance so conducive to advance. Each Sabbath should have a special time devoted to a view of the previous week. "Sleep," said Browne, "is so like death, I dare not trust it without my prayers, and I take my farewell in a colloquy with God." So each day we need to speak with ourselves, and thus examining our hearts, and then speaking with our God, we are prepared to lie down for repose. When the Sabbath comes, we have but to collect the evidence of the week, and thus the work before the feast, instead of being the assorting of a mass of doubtful evidence, becomes but the bringing and joining together of completed parts of arranged testimony. Thus, definite shape is given to this exercise, and from being an embarrassment, by the aid of the blessed Spirit it becomes a purifier, removing the dross, and brightening as well as proving the precious gold of our faith.

5. The other means of growth in grace must be diligently used, in order to render this one available for spiritual nourishment.

Unsustained by these, it will always be a failure. The blind man cannot see the cause of his own defect in sight; neither can the Christian who neglects the means of grace, measure his own character. He who cannot spiritually see much of God and use the mediums he has instituted, has no mirror in which to discern himself. The light that is in him will be darkness. He who has lived in neglect of ordinances, and all at once under the pressure of covenant relation, or the shadow of some affliction, attempts to interrogate his soul, must grope. Much of the difficulty of self-search, has its origin here. Whoever finds himself in trouble in the work, should institute at once a more rigorous exercise of all his means of grace. These are the precious and gracious instruments by which it is to be carried on. Though the power be of God, it must have these channels through which to flow. Though self-examination is not a part of prayer, or faith, or of any of the ordinances, it is nevertheless correlative thereto. We look not only to see ourselves as by nature, but to find if we ourselves are changed into the image of Christ, to see his likeness reflected in some feeble degree in our own characters; and these rays of his glory are transmitted to us through the means of grace. To be like him, and to discover that likeness, we must see him as he is, and this we cannot expect to do in neglect of appointed methods. We may not, it is true, limit the mercy of God. It is possible that he may at times show us to ourselves, and Christ to us, by special and extraordinary interpositions. But ordinarily we are to expect grace and growth in grace, acquaintance with God, acquaintance with self, the recognition of our own spiritual standing, in fact, everything incident to spiritual progress, chiefly in the use of his own chosen methods of meeting his people. It is, there-

fore, presumption to expect to examine one's self by the mere light of reason, or by meditation upon self, when by neglect of plain duties we shut ourselves in the dark, away from the only light that can savingly show us our hearts. When, therefore, perplexed in unsatisfactory attempts to scrutinize self, we are to betake ourselves to the means of grace, diligently and fervently serving the Lord in them. Thus he will lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and with a spiritual intelligence, a standard for comparison, a knowledge of self, a guide to examination, we may not only see ourselves as carnal sold under sin, but see Christ and whether he is formed within us the hope of glory."

6. Self-examination must be searching.

Superficiality is miserable here. In heart-culture take it as a truth settled beyond dispute, that whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well. Honesty is the best policy, in everything; but dishonesty with one's self, in soul interests, is as sad as personal and eternal jeopardies can make it. We are applying a test in a matter of stupendous importance. It must not be hesitatingly or indifferently done. The candle must be lighted, the house swept, the touch-stone applied, if need be, the probe used. With desire to get at the true state, the work must be carried on. The close of the most touching of the penitential Psalms expresses it all. "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Such is the spirit of our scrutiny. Yet it is not to be viewed as a task, a duty to which the soul is half unwillingly dragged, a complicated effort at self-crimination. Such is not the proper idea of the exercise. Rightly conducted, there is enjoyment in self-examination. Though a trial, it is self-instituted, and has

as its only design our own profit and increase. Its object is purification and proof of acceptance; and this is delightful. In the mere act of search, there is nothing painful. The world cannot understand how the Christian can be seeking out his sins, and yet be joyful and grow in grace thereby, just because it cannot understand how the mercy of God in Christ is magnified by the view of the greatness of the pardon secured; how the penitent disciple can look away from himself to his Saviour with glad emotion. But the Christian himself ought to rejoice. It is as a search for gold, even fine gold, and precious; it is a looking for Christ's likeness in one's own heart; a search for sin, not as a thing loved, but as an enemy already overcome, or over which we have in actual possession the means of victory. If hidden faults are brought to light, their existence may distress, but the exposure itself should be a cause of satisfaction; since the "first step to repentance is a sense of its necessity." The lurking foes to our holiness thus brought out, we can subdue with the weapons of our warfare. If conscious of manifold shortcomings, we are also conscious of fair work with ourselves; and if by prayer and watchful effort combating the special frailties thus recognized, we will also be conscious of a gain in godliness, making the inquiry each time more profitable and conducive to progress in holiness. If good works dwindle before such a search, justification by faith in Christ peers out from the gloom and illuminates the soul with that joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

Attach not then to self-examination the idea of an unpleasant ordeal. It is not a cross to be taken, but a privilege to be exercised. If unsatisfactory, the fault is in the subject, not in the act. For that which appears right and progressive, we have reason to bless God with devout thankfulness; while that

which is wrong is rather to be healed. Thus in each case grace-growth is the legitimate fruit. Many excellent saints have left as their testimony how it has led to humiliation, contrition, and gratitude; how it has been an aid to self-knowledge and knowledge of Christ in his relation to them. It is a spiritual *exercise* developing the spiritual power of the renewed soul, and should be employed as such. Use it as imparting strength and vigour to the soul's experience. Prove your own selves, then ye shall have *rejoicing* in yourselves and not in another. Search that the dross may be consumed, and that as precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, you may here have sweet foretastes of the inheritance of the saints in glory.

7. Besides a knowledge of the standard of our faith and practice, exalted ideas of the requisite purity of a Christian life, an inquiring spirit, and a frequent and searching self-scrutiny, sustained by a diligent use of the other means of growth in grace, it is important that we have precise views of what we especially seek in this exercise, and the method of obtaining it. The more we can simplify our ideas in respect to it, why so much the better. We are as far as possible to divest it of mystical uncertainties. It is a real self-testing, in matters which ought to be familiar to us. Although dealing with spiritual things, it has to do with them in their practical workings and results. It is a looking into regenerated human nature as it really is in ourselves; and the word with its precepts and examples, its doctrines and illustrations; conscience with its voices, nature with its indications, and the Spirit vouchsafed to help our infirmities, furnish such decided encouragement to successful effort as to leave no excuse for neglect.

There are three prominent subjects of inquiry in our efforts at self-examination.

1. The evidences that we are the children of God, redeemed through the merits of Christ.

2. To discover and bring to light our remaining and besetting sins, that we may recognize, repent of, and forsake them.

3. To discover what fruit we are bearing, and whether we are making increase in holiness.

These, although intimately connected, are susceptible of somewhat distinct notice, and the modes in which we investigate them, make up the system of our self-examination. The very disposition to enter upon the work, places us in the favourable attitude of seekers after saving truth ; and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, we will be sure to make some attainments in grace.

The first-named point of inquiry involves the very foundations of Christian hope. There are four kinds of evidence by which we may be aided in comprehending our real position. 1st. From our settled belief: 2d. From prevailing feelings: 3d. Past experience : 4th. Habitual acts.

As to belief. Do you regard the Bible as the word of God, and cherish it as the only correct rule of faith and practice? Have you a sense of personal guilt and unworthiness, regarding yourself as a sinner toward God, and sin as in its nature and results deserving severe punishment?

Do you recognize that mere sorrow or unspotted good works, even if possible, cannot save you ; since sorrow does not pay the debt, and good works are nothing more than duty for the present, and unavailing for the past?

Do you look upon Christ as the sacrifice for sin in your stead, and believe that by faith in him you have received pardon and acceptance ; and thus brought nigh to God, are made a sharer in his infinite merit and love?

This is religion ; and if thus you believe, your faith is surely right in theory. But we need to prove our own selves, and this may be done,

2. By a notice of prevailing feeling and desires.

Is love to God the supreme affection of your heart? Is he the object of your frequent thoughts and devout gratitude? Have you any other gods before him ; your pleasures, your property, your children, your honours? Is there anything you care for more than to please God?

You are not at a loss as to who are your most esteemed earthly friends? By the same mode of reckoning, can you not tell whether you are the friend of God?

Do you feel that your love for him is not gratuitous, but only a feeble return of his love for you? Do adoration, gratitude, penitence, petition, and earnest desire for more likeness to him mingle with your professed service?

Do you desire to do his will, and delight therein?

Do you cherish and magnify the love which he exhibited for you in that while you were an enemy, the Saviour died to save you?

Do you consider the highest use of your time, talents, money, everything, to be to advance his glory?

Although convinced of many short-comings and of imperfect service, do you recognize the bent of your affections to be toward him?

Do you dread to displease God, not only from fear of punishment, but because it is unholy, ungrateful, disgraceful to one's self, but still worse, disrespectful to your Maker? Is it the chief end of your life to *glorify God*, as well as to enjoy him for ever?

How is it with your love for man? Do you love a Christian whenever you see him, because he is a Christian? if he has

but the image and superscription of God, does it at once increase your regard for him? Can you overlook his faults, if you feel that his heart is right, and that he is striving for the mastery over sin? Even though you may be of different temperaments, are you conscious of interest in him as a brother in Christ, as of the household of faith?

Do you prefer the company and conversation of the righteous?

What are your feelings towards those out of Christ? Do you pray and labour for them, and think of their souls, as in eternal peril? Are you willing for Christ's sake, to try and do them good? Can you separate in your feelings between dislike of sin, and that love for the sinner, which leads you to desire his salvation?

3. What is the evidence of past experience? Can you refer to a period when there was an entire change in your views; when you first beheld yourself as a sinner, God as your ill-treated benefactor, and Christ as having shed his blood to save you? Or have you been conscious of a more gradual change in your inclinations and desires—not a mere morality, not well-doing in a mere worldly sense, from good training or interest, or natural force of character; but conscious of a longing after righteousness, because it is a duty due to God; a privilege, because you see in religion something desirable beyond all else, because Christ died to save sinners? Do you feel that you owe allegiance to God? Do you choose the ways of holiness? Are you conscious of a growing tendency to seek your duty and to do it?

Have you in the past enjoyed the closet, the home altar, the Scriptures, and other means of grace? Have you watched and struggled against sin, that you might have a conscience

void of offence toward God and man ; feeling that reconciliation, as well as reformation, was necessary ; and looking to God by his Holy Spirit to assist you ?

Past experience is chiefly to be valued as corroborative of present faithfulness. But it may also be referred to, to aid our faith when the heart is desponding, and when Satan most severely assaults. It is only one link in the chain of evidence ; but held up by grace, will aid in adding more, that we may hold fast our confidence firm unto the end. Thus the past and present joined, help to complete the circle of endless love ; although without the present evidence, there is a void.

4. What are your habitual acts ? Is the experience of every-day life, in its general tenor, in accordance with the will of God ? Are you diligent and conscientious to know his will ? Have you a present love for his service, delight in his law, eagerness for his salvation ? Which do you value most, your hopes for this world or the next ? Are your inclinations after holiness ?

Is the flesh kept under, so that the natural desires and propensities of the evil heart are mostly under control ? Does sin rarely obtain the advantage over you in the exhibition of evil temper or conduct ? Are you striving to have the thoughts as well as the actions right ? Do you enjoy the private means of grace ?

Does religion seem to you the most reasonable and pleasant service which you perform in daily life ?

Are you sedulously endeavouring to do the will of God, as made known in his commandments, and striving after more exact conformity to his will ?

Do you act as one grateful for mercies fully and freely dispensed ? Under affliction or adversity do you find comfort in religion ? Are you doing works meet for repentance ?

Such are a few, yet sufficient, of the comprehensive tests of acceptance with God. Yet these taken alone, are not to occupy the undivided attention. It is possible for the true Christian to be at times perplexed, and in doubt as to his experience upon some of these points. In such cases, for the time being, not laying again the foundation of repentance and of faith toward God, we may go on to perfection, by a scrutiny of self as to the other themes for self-inspection, already noticed as a part of the process. Obtaining new knowledge from these, we then may return to the summing up of the evidence of our heirship, and be able the more fully to give a reason for the hope that is in us with meekness and fear.

II. QUESTION NOW THE SOUL AS TO THE BESETTING SINS OF LIFE, THAT YOU MAY RECOGNIZE, MOURN OVER, AND FORSAKE THEM.

Is your daily prayer to God, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults?" Do you studiously search out the evil tendencies of your nature? Do you seek by knowledge of the word and by the Spirit's aid, to have such correct views, as shall furnish you a standard by which to judge yourself?

Do you detect pride in the heart, in the form of self-praise, self-dependence, and self-exaltation; and then humble yourself, by considering how every good and perfect gift is from above, and in how many things you come short. Is impatience or irritability a felt weakness? Then do you watch it and cultivate patience, forbearance, discretion, forgiveness, pray over the besetting sins, and seek the neutralizing graces? Is selfishness, love of money, love of the world, love of honour, the prevailing tendency? Do you often consider the uncer-

tainty of all earthly things, and what it shall profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

Do you find your mind absorbed with some particular train of thought, cherishing resentments, thinking evil, wedded to the world, not having God in its thoughts? Then remember, out of the heart are the issues of life, and evil thoughts indulged will bear bitter fruit. When you find a sin, do you seek to palliate it, or do you mourn for it, confess it, and forsake it, endeavouring after new obedience? Are you conscious of trying to be honest with yourself in order that you may be honest toward God?

Here we have the value of frequent examination magnified. It is hard to pick the tares out of a granary of wheat, but from a single handful, with a little care, they are easily separated. It is so with the sins of daily life. He who will briefly review each day at its close; on each Sabbath recount his week's experience, and at each communion sum up his case, has a systematic and practical method of finding out his real spiritual state. Embarrassments now and then may, and will occur, but God is on our side and he will help us by the Spirit which he giveth liberally to them that ask it. Thus, self-examination, from being an imperfect effort in a slough of despond, is the healthful cleansing away of a mass not yet so tenacious or unfathomable; and is one of the refreshing washings of grace, which impart vigour and force to other spiritual exercises.

III. OUR THIRD DESIGN IN SELF-EXAMINATION, IS TO DIS-
CERN WHAT FRUIT WE ARE BEARING, AND WHETHER
WE ARE MAKING INCREASE IN HOLINESS.

This is the most important of all; for if proved, it includes and illustrates the other two. It is the practical test

which the Gospel recognizes for the assurance of our faith. It is the sealing of the witness which the Spirit gives of our inheritance among them that are sanctified. Without this, shadows of doubt, like the distorted views of twilight, will rest upon the soul, and cause its faith to waver. Even the search after besetting sins, while showing an earnest desire to be true to self, will lack that reliance upon "the faithful Promiser," which will secure a repentance not to be repented of. "Where there is no growth," says Dr. A. Alexander, "there is no life;" and where there is neither, it will be hard for us to distinguish ourselves from those dead in trespasses and sins. We are in the border land of the backslider, and it is hard to take correct views of self from such a stand-point. With no promised land before the spiritual sight, and with such a wilderness about us, it will be strange if we do not find our faces turned toward the flesh-pots of Egypt. How important, in every respect, that we institute the earnest inquiry, whether we are growing Christians, whether we are bringing forth fruit meet for repentance.

Happily, the word of God does not leave us in doubt as to what these fruits are. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and the like, are easily recognized as characteristic results of righteousness. The precepts, warnings, and examples of holy Writ scatter all along its pages, the contrasts between the unfruitful works of darkness, and the increase of spiritual illumination. Even though mourning their absence, or only a partial possession, we are not left in doubt, as to what are the comforting gifts and graces of a holy life. Amidst our *thoughts*, our *feelings*, our *words*, and our *works*, we are to look for the signs of fruit and of increasing holiness. Does the mind with increasing

frequency and joy revert to God, amidst the secularities of life? Do holy thoughts occupy the mind with satisfaction? Are evil thoughts, instead of being cherished, met with a "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Are they an annoyance, and is there a systematic effort to prevent them from ripening into evil acts?

Are the exercises of religion a source of pleasure? When falling into sin, is it the occasion of deep sorrow, not only on account of its results, but because we have displeased God? Are spiritual duties pleasant? Do you *enjoy religion*? Do Christ and his salvation seem more and more precious? Do heavenly concerns seem of increasing interest and importance to you? Do you see more and more to adore in the word and works of God, and in his dealings with you? Does your gratitude to him increase? Is there a longing desire after growth in holiness? Is there a growing fondness for the means of grace?

Does your profession have a practical effect on your daily conversation? Do you walk circumspectly? Do you put a guard on your lips, that you sin not with your tongue? Though you daily sin in thought, word, and deed, is there a struggling against it? Do you find it more easy and natural for you to talk upon religious themes and about spiritual concerns, feeling what you say, than you formerly did? Are you conscious of gaining in the government of the tongue? Do wrong sentiments, hasty expressions, idle words, give place to those "fitly spoken, which are like apples of gold in pictures of silver?" Are you striving after the language of Christ? Are the utterances of your lips such as do not excuse or favour wrong doing? Do you endeavour to avoid evil speaking? Is it your daily

prayer, accompanied with corresponding effort, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips?"

Are you striving eagerly to *do* the will of God? Do you count that time well spent, which is devoted to his service? Do you deny yourself in worldly things, that you may spare of your substance and influence for Christ, as a steward of the manifold grace of God? To do good; is this the grand accomplishment you propose to yourself in life? When the effort is crowned with success, and others praise you for consistency or earnestness, do you feel humbly thankful to God for his blessing on your labours? "Our progress in holiness," says one, "may be measured by our humility." Is your chief desire in doing good, to glorify God, and to save souls? Are you a *labourer* in the vineyard of the Lord? Is it by the grace of God helping you, your motto, "The world shall be the better for my having lived in it?" Do your afflictions and other chastisements, though at first not joyous, so exercise you as to yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness? Can you say with the Apostle, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus?"

Two or three sources of error may be noticed in connection with this work of self-examination.

1. It is not a mere work of question and answer.

These are auxiliary helps. But the act itself has a wider scope. We may be perplexed as to definite replies to certain interrogatories, and yet gather comforting information as to the welfare of our souls. We may beget a consciousness of right inclination, and of acceptance with God, even when unable to

clothe it in words, just as we may be conscious of our own identity without a wording of the proof. The pervading tendency of the heart after holiness may satisfy us that there is a principle there supplanting our human natures, even when we may as yet lack some of the identified results of faith. The very desire to know more of self, and of God, and to grow in grace, put in execution as it is in self-examination, is an advance in holiness. We are not to rest, it is true, without clearer evidences; but we are not to be discouraged, if we do not find all the fruits or all the increase we desire.

2. The design of self-examination is not so much to show us how good we are, as to show us how good God is. A true Christian indeed is often sorely embarrassed in this work by detecting the indwelling corruption of the heart. While finding, it is to be hoped, a progress in goodness, he will not fail to see enough of sin to make him humble. We need not only to see God's mercy to us in conversion, but in forgiving us for our iniquities after the oath of allegiance. He who in this scrutiny is looking only to see himself, will not grow in grace thereby. But the greatness of the benefit is that it acquaints us with God just in the way in which we most need to know him; as a Saviour, not only once but always; and our *Sanctifier* too; and seeing this, our ordeal becomes our joy. Though called *self-examination*, it means, because as a spiritual exercise, it includes *meditation* upon God as manifest in the flesh to take away our sins, and on self to find how far this object of his death has been secured in us.

Christ formed within us the hope of glory, lifts the veil from off the carnal heart, and shows us the temple of his holiness within. Around it are the ruins of sin, and evidences of our own frailties, but the deliberate choice is to serve God.

There is a beauty and a comeliness which, if not fully attained, is earnestly desired, and the yearning of the soul is for more righteousness.

But suppose no such experience or feelings can be indulged, and the professed Christian, after an honest attempt to find out his spiritual condition, is in a darkness which can be felt. It is a deplorable condition, but not a hopeless one. Even now the work may be a means of growth in holiness. Indulge not now in a morbid effort to know thyself. Do not on the one hand sit occupied in hugging gloom about your hopes, nor on the other conclude that it is not worth while to be concerned about your spiritual standing. If anything mortal or immortal is worth knowing, it is just this. Postpone the examination until you once more put in practice the methods of attainment. Betake yourself to the other means of grace. Be faithful at the private altar, study the book of spiritual knowledge, be instant in season and out of season, doing your duty in the fear of God, by humility, by study, by crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," striving for the experience of the Christian. Then after a time seek again a view of your own spiritual life; know of the doctrine by doing it. Thus fed, grace will prepare you to return to be nourished upon the strong meat of a tested faith. Thus being more fully persuaded, and knowing more of the grace which is by Christ Jesus, you may so see self by the reflecting mirror of Christ's righteousness, as to know whom you have believed. Thus enabled to view yourself between the cross and the crown, redeemed by the one and striving for the other, noting your progress by test of faith, you will go from strength to strength, until that which is perfect is come, and that which is in part shall be done away.

IV. FASTING AS A MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

One of the means of growth in holiness which is not appreciated by many professing Christians of the present age, is that of fasting. Its value was so frequently recognized in the early Church, that it is difficult for us to question its continued availability.

The Israelites, when anxious for victory over their spiritual enemies, when repenting of their sins, or in deep affliction on account of severe chastisements, often thus besought the Lord so as to obtain a blessing. Samuel and Ezra, David, Daniel, and the prophets frequently directed them to this as a befitting attitude, in which to return and make progress in the paths of righteousness. When the disciples of Jesus privately asked him why they failed in accomplishing one of the highest achievements of faith, his reply was, "Howbeit this kind goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting." The fasting Cornelius had an angel visit and a precious experience. It was when serving God with fastings and prayers that Anna beheld the Saviour as her promised Messiah, and abounded in grace. The apostles often united fasting with their worship. Paul in his epistle to the churches, exhorted the disciples to give themselves to this duty as their spiritual edification might seem to require it. The unreasonable extent to which, as a mere formality, it was carried by the Romish Church, led to its almost complete abandonment by many of the Protestant faith. But there are nevertheless important principles as well as authority, which direct us to it as a means of spiritual nourishment. Though in itself, like other sensible expressions of our religion, not possessed of intrinsic virtue, yet as a recognized means of grace, it places the soul in a position favourable to spiritual progress, and

deserves to be noticed as a method of promoting the welfare of the heart. It is adapted to us as a means of growth in grace.

1. Because it interrupts a class of our most easily besetting sins.

The indulgence of the appetites and passions of our human nature, is the great temptation to sin with which Satan besieges the soul. The man who is able to govern these, and make them meekly submissive to grace, has attained no small achievement in the conflict for holiness. In conversion, blessed be God, light breaks through this besiegement; but though grace attains the mastery, and the Holy Spirit is vouchsafed to maintain it, the evil spirit of fleshly wisdom still ventures to lure us with the ash-apples of sensual indulgence. To this, fasting interposes a barrier. It institutes a short but suggestive intermission in the provision for the body, that it may administer grace to the soul. It brings under the carnal to the spiritual, long enough for lessons of reflection and benefit. It bids the flesh for a while wait in denial, as one under command, while the Spirit is feasting upon the fulness which is by Christ Jesus the Lord. The physical and the worldly intellectual need a special lesson in subjection, that we may learn to love God with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind; and hold communion with him. It is a type and foreshadowing of that heavenly state, in which we "shall no more hunger and no more thirst," because, "God shall feed us in the ways, and he that hath mercy on us shall guide us by springs of water." It is meet that we should thus make a stoppage in the administration to our carnal natures, that we may measure our control by grace over bodily lusts; that we may repent of our manifold sins; and may more pointedly consider of how much

greater importance it is to nurture the soul than the body. We are not to fast as did the Pharisee, making of it, as he did of his prayers, his alms, and all else, a merit. But rather, as says an old divine, we are to use it as a "man takes physic, of which no man hath reason to be proud, but it is necessary when in sickness, or in danger and disposition to it." Such is the state of us all, as to those sins which address themselves to the prominent tendencies of passion, appetite, and lust; and when we rightly keep fast before the Lord, the restraint it affords, and the reflections it suggests, are friendly to that purification and control, which a recognition of our need, and a resort to the sovereign remedies of grace are certain to secure.

2. As an act of self-denial it has a special tendency to remind us of Christ in his self-sacrificing offices for us.

Our knowledge and personal experience of sin in the prominent manifestations of every-day life, is the sadly illustrated commentary, how hard it is for the carnal nature to keep itself under restraint. Experience rolls down its voice-echoes of warning; reason pronounces its teachings true; self-indulgence proves the way of the transgressor hard; and yet the appetites and passions drag their victims into many a hurtful snare, at last drowning them in perdition. Even in the Christian, a denial of the proclivities of nature, for conscience' sake, for a brief time, in order to keep holy-day for the soul, is an exercise of decision of character, which cultivates spiritual force. For many a Christian, the control of his table-appetite would be a growth in grace, even if his fasting taught him nothing else. Humanly speaking, the unnatural character of this restraint is a reason why so few professors actually observe it. When we thus find by a view of others, and by personal trial, how hard it is, even with a hope of grace, to bring the appetites and

passions thus under a special jurisdiction, we can better appreciate the rigid path of stern self-denial which the Saviour endured for us. By such a light, the temptation in the wilderness makes a new demand upon my faith and love. Not only in view of the consummation, but of the introductory fast of his ministry, and others following it, the Christian may well exclaim,

“ What he endured, oh ! who can tell,
To save our souls from death and hell ! ”

We cannot afford to lose the effect of an exercise, which so naturally reminds us of the self-denial of Jesus for our sakes. When we for Christ's sake deny ourselves, not in mere form, but in holy meditation and meekness of spirit, redeeming the time, we use a blessed means of cultivating holiness. Humility, self-denial, self-mortification as to the flesh, and repentance, are ideas which we naturally associate with fasting. These are fruitful surroundings of grace, and with the act itself, reminding us of Christ in his noblest, yet most poignant offices of redeeming love, we have a spiritual tabernacle where we may meet God, a silence in the valley of humiliation, where he delights to have us hear his voice.

3. Fasting exalts the value of the spiritual above the carnal.

Alas ! that the heart is carnal, sold under sin, the Christian feels in the sad experiences of his own remaining inclinations. What shall I eat ? What shall I drink ? Wherewithal shall I be clothed ? are questions which human nature will ever be unbecomingly intruding upon the attention of all who are not quite thoroughly victors by the power of faith and love. Hence Christ, in his first sermon to his disciples, directed one of its earnest and thrilling appeals to this very point. When, for the sake of considering our purely spiritual relations, we for a time dismiss this care for the body even as to present

supply, and bid all corporeal interests for a while adieu, that our spirits may dwell with God, we are in a fitting attitude to rest upon the arm of our beloved, and to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Dependence upon God is one of the prominent lessons of a fast. What an important lesson it is for our faith to learn, and our life to practice! When the fast is over, we may still carry with us its spiritual culture, and more readily remember in our daily life, how He who feeds the sparrows, and clothes the lily with beauty, will provide for those who hold the flesh under subjection, that the spirit may feast upon the fulness of Him who filleth all in all.

From such considerations, as well as from the testimony and experience of eminent Christians in every age of the Church, we are constrained to regard this as a means of growth in grace worthy of the examination and trial of those who would avail themselves of all the methods conducive to spiritual progress. But in order to be efficient for this purpose,

1. The fast must not be a mere form, but a real spiritual exercise.

A study of the habits of those who have been nurtured by this exercise, shows that, not in the mere act itself, but in the state of mind conjoined therewith, was the source of soul-enlargement. One has ever found it good thus to commemorate the day of his new-birth; another thus signified his remembrance of some remarkable deliverance; another under the burden of affliction, has thus humbled himself before God; still another has added it to his mourning over some committed or besetting sin. Thus all kept solemn fast unto the Lord, that it, as an instrument and token, might teach the soul more fully to rely upon Jesus. Hence that idea of a fast, which deprives self of some one thing, and makes a surfeit of

everything else, which foregoes one appetite or passion, and indulges all the rest, which seeks to forget an omitted meal in company or mirth, has in it no grace-growth at all. It is only the mockery of a form, without substance, and renders the subject worthy of the reproof of the Lord by Zechariah, to the fasting Jews. When ye fasted, "Did ye at all fast unto *me*?" But when the time thus set apart, is devoted to sacred uses, when heavenly meditation draws us nigh to God, when the heart is humbled, and the fast of the body is the feast of the soul, then is true nourishment found sweeter than honey and the honey-comb, and the whole man is satisfied as with marrow and fatness. "Take fasting strictly for bodily abstinence," says Scudder, "so it is an indifferent thing, and is no part of God's worship; but take it as it is joined with the inward part, and is referred to a religious end, being a profession of an extraordinary humiliation; and it is a great assistance to a man's spiritual and reasonable service of God." Hence some denying of self at set times, a fast perhaps before the communion season, an abstinence from lawful privileges under special circumstances, is often blessed to the culture of pure and undefiled religion. In all this we are to look to the Spirit's aid, and with self-control and humiliation of the body, we may reasonably expect that God will grant us more abundantly of his grace.

2. In fasting it is best to have a definite spiritual object in view.

Generalities are too often devices of Satan, and a large element in many barren ordinances. They who always confess their sins by wholesale, may never admit them in detail. They who fast by frequent appointed days, because with them it is a habit, or in their church an order, may fall into the same error.

But this is not likely to occur, if a specific object is before the mind. Is it a fast in view of certain bodily lusts or appetites? Then consider how these are to be overcome. Is it in view of crosses and trials? Then let the word be searched, to know what good things these mean. Is it a mourning for indisposition to spiritual effort, or for the desolations of Zion about you? Then let this humble you, and its interests concentrate your thoughts. Is national disaster distressing and perplexing you? Then seek to know the sins which are our reproach, and implore that righteousness which exalteth a nation. Our own growth in grace is more fully secured, by recognizing ourselves as channels of faith, as in a relation with the loving kindness of Jehovah, and influential in obtaining his grace for ourselves and others. What influence comparable with this? Is it not worth our while to humble ourselves, fasting, that we may partake of durable riches and righteousness?

3. Fasting should be always accompanied with devout meditation and prayer. It is as the preparation or accompaniment to these that it is especially valuable.

“Prayer and fasting,” have at times a natural relationship. When the soul is most moved in repentance, overwhelmed with the sense of sin; when the glory of salvation appears so beautiful, that all things else are not worthy to be named; when humility is before honour, and we thus have access with boldness to the mercy seat, there is little thought about bodily want. When by our own appointment mere carnal desires are laid aside, then communion with God is the sweet replenishment which can soothe and refresh the whole nature. It is sanctified by prayer and by meditation on the word of God. Redeemed from the indulgences of carnal desires, and thus dedicated to his service, we can devoutly hope that in the midst

of our abstinence, angels will come and minister unto us. We have no recorded instance of fasting without other worship conjoined therewith. As the prelude or assistant to the frame of mind conducive to devout and heart-melting supplication, it adds acceptance to our humiliation and prayer. As the Christian's guide and interpreter, it pours the oil of consolation over the heart, and shows the plains of the New Jerusalem covered with the manna of grace, and its springs gushing and sparkling with the water of life. "The hungry soul shall give *thee* praise and righteousness, O Lord!" "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Thus, as occasions may indicate, employ fasting as a means of growth in holiness, and you too may learn to speak of it, and better still to feel it, as did the fathers of the church: "A nourishment of prayer, the restraint of lust, the wings of the soul, the instrument of humility and self-denial, and purification of spirit," and to say with the prayer-loving Jeremy Taylor, that "no man can reprove it or undervalue it, but he that knows neither spiritual arts or spiritual necessities."

CHAPTER X.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

PERSONAL EFFORT FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS—INTERCOURSE
WITH FELLOW-CHRISTIANS.

PERSONAL EFFORT FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS AS
A MEANS OF PERSONAL INCREASE IN HOLINESS

“Christian! would you grow in grace,
And like Jesus more become;
Till in heaven you see his face,
Free from sin, and safe at home?
While you trust in Jesus’ blood
Taste the sweets of doing good!”

It is an admitted rule in the economy of grace, that the implanted principle of good permitted to act itself out, develops in its possessor a strength and growth, which multiplies in proportion to its proper exercise. On this view alone we might rest the argument for personal exertion in behalf of the souls of others. But so important is the subject in its bearing upon the culture of our own hearts, and the keeping of them with diligence, that it may be well for us to magnify this merciful permission of our heavenly Father; and to notice how this is a proper employment of our religion, and tends to our own sanctification. With the persuasion that our sufficiency is of

God, that to our planting or watering, he alone can give the increase, regarding ourselves as instruments and him as the power, our effort for the salvation of others is promotive of grace-growth,

I. BECAUSE IT SETS US TO WORK FOR GOD IN THE RIGHT WAY.

It is no more a law of the physical nature that it is strengthened by appropriate exercise and labour, than that the spiritual principle in the Christian is thus strengthened by labour for souls. The very moment we set out to do something for the salvation of others, we touch not only the chords of human sympathy, but those of divine grace, and they vibrate responsive to the effort. It is a natural use of our religion which, even if unexpressed, thrills in the converted soul ready and waiting to be brought into actual use. The very first breathing of an effort to save another soul, is a marshalling of the forces of our regenerated hearts. It strikes no doubtful blow at the selfishness of sin, and in true compassion feels and acts as if in this sense its brother's keeper. It feels the reception of a great gift, a divine favour of grace, and embodies the expression of it in an endeavour that another may be sharer of the same beatitude. Comprehending its true relation to the human race, like the Good Samaritan, it shows that it knows who its neighbours are. We cannot pass by on the other side and carry a vigorous piety with us. Though like the priests and the Levite, we may have a record in the church, we are stinting our growth in grace. But let religion work out its legitimate results, and the human is stirred with a superhuman principle, and upgrowing, outshooting graces must appear. Leaving out

entirely any consideration of good to others, the blessing it confers on self is sufficient to justify the effort. Grace thus labouring will not be dwarfed. It is feeding, it is flourishing, it is working, it is growing. It maketh increase of holiness to the edifying of itself in love. It is working rightly for God, and that is always growth in grace.

The highest value we can attach to labour as a necessary assistant to the perfecting of physical or mental power, is reduplicated, when we come to apply it to the concerns of our spiritual life. Besides bringing the analogies and proofs attaching to the former, it adds the grand climax of a divine personal blessing upon our efforts. It is the employment of a power, which, every time we use it, comes back to us, not exhausted, for it is exhaustless, but with an extra acquisition of strength. In watering others we ourselves are watered. This is one of the givings by which we may increase. The epistle of James not only tells us, "Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death," but also, "shall hide a multitude of sins." He receives to himself a fountain of grace which submerges the powers of sin, and overcomes the indwellings of an evil heart. If you would know how Doddridge grew in grace, read the record of his labours for souls. If you would copy from Baxter, and behold how his saintly soul ripened for its heavenly rest, view Kidderminster as he found it, and Kidderminster as he left it; how he laboured for the salvation of the town, and plead privately from house to house for Jesus, until whole streets were converted, and it became a monument of grace, and he himself the most blessed recipient of his labours. Brainerd, Martyn, McCheyne, and multitudes of others, have followed the example of the Bible saints, and by abounding in efforts

for souls, have also abounded in the accumulating fruits of holiness. Christian, if you would grow in grace, you must be working; telling to others how to find the Saviour you have found; showing to friends and neighbours what a city of destruction they are in, and how they may flee to the Zoar of salvation. Some may heed, and if some do not, "thou hast delivered thyself," and with faith confirmed, graces developed, and a consciousness of having attempted to work for Christ and for souls, with feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel, and with your breast-plate radiant with this insignia of love, you will also be conscious of progress in the divine life. Next to the love of God, the largest fruitage of piety, is to love thy neighbour as thyself and this is its most sublime and joyful application. The effort may be made by a kind word, a godly walk, a Sabbath-school instruction, a lent book, a dropped tract, an earnest appeal, a serious look. But if prompted by the love of Christ and of souls, it will never lose its reward upon yourself. It is written with a shining mark which all eternity will not wear away, and the note of a Saviour at its margin is, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." It will fill a vacant place in the measure of your grace-growth here, and add its luscious particle of joy to the final welcome, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

II. THIS PERSONAL EFFORT FOR SOULS, MAKES OUR CHRISTIANITY PRACTICAL, AND IS THUS AN ELEMENT OF GROWTH.

It brings us out from the coldness which always attaches even to a perfect theory, to the enthusiasm which always at-

tends a correct practice. It has been affirmed in respect to the introduction of Christianity into heathen lands, that it is necessary to have it inculcated by a living ensample. Its teachings and doctrines are so sublimely above the highest conceptions of the unregenerate, that it is impossible to explain its power, except as accompanied with a real illustration. Christ, himself, might have left us a Bible and a system ; but he did more ; he gave himself. He lived, he acted, he worked, he died for the salvation of others. His practical self was the Exemplar, and among our thanksgivings, we should never forget Christ as our toiling Forerunner.

Now in order that we may realize Christ in ourselves, we must recognize in ourselves his working disciples. The principle must practicalize itself, in order to expand, and it can do so in no other way better, than in divine reliance, working for the salvation of others. It thus links itself, just where it belongs, in the chain between God and unconverted men, and inward growth is alternately the result and cause of efficient action. Grace is intertwined with grace, God rewarding our labours with his own grace, and filling us with the abundance of the good things we dispense to others. Unless constantly looking to God for direction, one may become a formalist even in such work. Making no effort at all, he is an unconscious idler, which is still worse.

It is one of the most important, and yet, seemingly, one of the most difficult lessons for many Christians, how to make their Christianity practically useful to others, and so more full of vitality to their own souls. It is by a sense of duty and privilege, and continued effort under God, that this freedom can be acquired. When the Christian comes to recognize his own practical religion, as one of God's means for regenerating

the world, he knows that his spiritual vitality is being nourished. It is co-working with God ; and is not this grace-culture ? He employs us not for *his* good, not for *other's* good alone, but for *our own* good. Our effort for others was meant to be an essential part of our own Christianity. God has attached to it this blessing upon ourselves. "What a monstrous thing it would be for a man," says Dr. J. W. Alexander, "to spend a life-time in the midst of fellow-beings, without ever feeling or acting toward them in a religious capacity." Heart-religion cannot grow in such a soil. Let your profession of Christ be a power felt by others, not only that it may bless them, but that you may witness in yourself the practical reward of well-doing, and receive the best pay a Christian can have : progress in holiness.

III. CHRISTIAN EFFORT FOR OTHERS IS BENEFICIAL TO US,
BECAUSE IT IMPRESSES UPON US THE IMPORTANCE
OF CONSISTENCY, AND THUS HELPS TO GUARD US FROM
SIN.

It is a stimulus to that propriety of character and conduct, which much conduces to the growth and beauty of holiness. A conscious dereliction from duty never seems more annoying and distressing to the real disciple, than when called upon to make effort for the salvation of others. It at once places us in a relationship to them which cannot but put pharisaical pretensions to the blush, or throw a glaring light upon inconsistent acts. Even to the delicate sensibilities of an unrenewed heart, there is something unpleasant in attempting to recommend what it does not attempt to practice. But when we come to moral precepts, it is outright hypocrisy, the baseness of which

we ourselves can readily recognize. And where is the sincere Christian who is not, by the very effort to save others, urged to a higher standard of Christian life? The very desire presents a right motive to the soul for a holy ambition after holiness, and makes one anxious to recommend by example as well as by precept, the lesson intended to be conveyed. Then we need fear no self-mortifying retort. Though conscious of coming far short of duty, in the manliness of converted might, and with the consciousness of aiming for the mark of the prize, we may stand up humbly, yet boldly and earnestly for God, and in so doing get strength for progression. Christian consistency is indeed a jewel. Never do its beauties sparkle more brilliantly than when it shines out in an effort to save another soul, and is reflected back to encourage new growth of grace in our own hearts. Where the effort is made trusting in God, and from a heart moved by an appreciation of his love, such is sure to be the result. The doing of good becomes a means not only to the object, but to the medium himself, by a potent force aiding him to "walk circumspectly," "to depart from evil and do good," to be fruitful in good works, and to have the results thereof manifest in his own experience. He who feels this as one of the vocations to which he is called, will have a pressing argument to walk worthily thereof. He, who to the most natural question of a renewed soul, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do," hears the responsive voice of the Master, will not fail to follow in this respect the command, and in his own improving consistency, experience the fulfilment of the promise, "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and *verily thou shalt be fed.*"

IV. PERSONAL EFFORT FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS
FAVOURS OUR OWN GROWTH IN GRACE, BY MAKING US
BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH OURSELVES.

Self-acquaintance is of all the hardest to form. The corrupt depth of the human heart in its fallen state, is such that no common line or plummet will fathom it; and yet, the more the Christian knows himself, the more will he seek to be like-minded with Christ. When from a perception of self, he cries out, O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? with a more devout thanksgiving he is able to say, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." The severe contrast between man the sinner, and Christ the Saviour, is brought more vividly to view. The amazing love and condescension of our Redeemer is portrayed in something of its true character, and the soul, as it sees the fulness of the iniquity from which it has obtained deliverance, is better prepared to feel that its springs and its sufficiency are in God.

Strange as it may seem, we may often see ourselves in others. Human nature has in it so much that is common to us all, that we may not unfrequently recognize frailties in others, and then trace their counterparts in our own hearts; when before we have overlooked them in ourselves. As our own images are daguerreotyped upon the retina of another's eye, so here we may learn better how "to see ourselves as others see us." Thus we are each other's mirrors, in which we can discern the lineaments of our own unrenewed heart.

Make an effort to save another, not as a mere moralist or philanthropist, but as a servant of God; and see if it does not fasten your mind more on divine things, and enable you so to see the phases of human character, as to lead you to greater

zeal in perfecting your holiness. That one must be hardened in sin, who can make sacrifices to save others, and yet not earnestly seek, by a high standard of Christian principle, to gather fruit unto eternal life. Thus in effort for others, we not only behold the human heart in its unsubdued enmity, but we get the portrait of self. "Ah!" said the good Dr. Ives, as criminals passed by his house on their way to Tyburn, "there am I without the grace of God." Besides the obstacles which we find preventing others from coming to the cross, are of the same class with those which prevent the Christian from keeping near it. Do you find in effort for another, how riches, or ambition, or the love of the world in some other form, is destroying the soul? How selfishness, or revenge, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are bolting the gates of the kingdom against it? Are not these perhaps in different notes, but in the same spirit, endeavouring to lull your soul with a false repose? The enemy which you see destroying others, must it not be more completely overcome in you? Seeing yourself by such easily recognized side-lights, does not progress in holiness seem more desirable than ever? Is it safe to linger on the plain, even though you be outside the city of destruction? The very effort, by what of ourselves we see in others, is the rebound of an applied force to push us nearer heaven. We learn anew the lesson that it is all of grace. Thus the Christian, working for the salvation of others, makes sure of a double allowance in the exchanges of grace. The good done to others is one of the rewards of holiness,—glorious contrast to the wages of sin,—while besides, the work-act itself strengthens the soul for abounding progress. Thus "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour," and to him that thus "soweth in righteousness shall be a sure reward."

V. EFFORTS FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS MADE IN DEPENDENCE UPON GOD ARE SURE OF DOING GOOD ; AND THUS OUR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH IS OFTEN RE-NEWED BY SEEING THE WORK OF THE LORD PROSPER.

The essence of our faith is not in the results which we see, but in our implicit confidence in God as he has revealed himself in his word ; in that belief which is " the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Nevertheless God does often see fit to promote grace-growth by the tangible evidences of his blessing upon those who labour for the souls of men. Our faith in efforts to do good is verified by results. God, though he needs not our poor services, deigns to show us that he permits us to be co-workers with him in the grand designs of Providence and grace. The seed sown springs up to everlasting life, and as we see effects, we receive increase with the increase of God. As his testimony he gives the seal of his Spirit, and turns the hearts of the children of men to himself. Casting this bread upon the waters, though we find it not at once, we shall find it after many days. Were there no other argument for attempting to do good to others, save the benefit to our own souls, this would be enough to speed us in the effort. But when this comes back to us laden with precious evidences of good to others, there is a chorus to the pean of rejoicing. Our piety is then what it was meant to be, not a mere consumer, but a producer, and we too are fed on its precious fruitage.

Indeed it is scarcely possible to conceive of a Christian growing, or designing to grow in grace, and yet careless as to the salvation of his fellow men. What ! possessed of the greatest of all blessings, the pearl of great price, without which all else

is worthless, and never recommend it to thy brother, thy neighbour, thy friend, when by so doing thou not only dost duty to him, but enrichest thyself? Are those about thee travelling to eternal burnings, and shall no word of caution or of entreaty escape thy lips? Wilt thou stand listless and see those yet unsaved, for whom Christ died? Is the value of the soul to thee a mere theory, and not a felt reality? If thou doest speak to the wicked and he turn not, says Ezekiel, "thou hast delivered thy soul." But if this means which God has recognized is effectual to salvation, as it often is, then even here "we may receive a full reward" in our own reviving in holiness. The chosen times to favour Zion are generally those when Christians are praying and working both. When those times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord, where is the Christian whose own soul is not strengthened and nurtured? Even though not able to recognize the specific results of each particular effort, yet when God puts together the little accepted works of his people, and adds to them as the purifier and the justifier his own completed righteousness, then, as the showers of mercy fall, though we know not each dew-drop of our work, thus drawn up by the Sun of Righteousness, again to descend in blessing, yet we do feel the results and obtain vigour therefrom. The working Christian feels that he has a part and a lot in that matter, and rising to a higher table-land of faith, makes sure and rapid advance in grace.

Is it not manifestly an absolute necessity of a growing godliness that it should be kept growing by works? God has something for his people to do. Work in my vineyard, is the command, which, passing down the line of centuries, summons every Christian to gird himself in the strength of the Redeemer. None is exempt from obedience to the call. The

man with but a single talent has no business to hide it away in a napkin. If he has grace, that is enough to begin with and to end with. We cannot do the work upon angels or the inanimate creation. The one need it not, and the other cannot receive it. But mankind are within our reach, and Christian effort for them is working for God. Christian activity is not only the law of the church, but the inexorable law of growth in grace. We must thus develope the exhaustless resources of our religion. We must feel it as a leaven, rising and spreading, and working, until others feel its power, and then we will feed upon its life. It is often affirmed, that the demand of the world, and especially of our own age, is that we should arise and gird on our armour, and awake in the strength of our Redeemer, but it is not less the demand of our own spiritual culture. The highest attainments in religion are not to be won by inoperative imbecility. The burning fire will not be smouldered long; the smoking flax will not long be quenched. Good works, though not the root, or sap, or vine, are yet the fruit. Efforts for the good of souls are a part of the luscious vintage, and when others gather, we enter into their blessing. We are made partakers with Christ and with them.

As there are diversities of gifts, so there is diversity in the modes of operation; but put it down as a fundamental law in your profession and confession of faith, that grace affirms the duty, and that growth in grace will prompt the desire and make the effort for a brother's soul an element in your own growth in grace. A Christ-conferred gift to self, will be the climax to the achievement. If this be thus a method of culture, since the fulness thereof depends somewhat upon the mode, it becomes us briefly to inquire, how best to secure the full luxuriance of this yield.

1. The effort must be timely.

This is a point which does not need to be much insisted upon. Too many act as if all times were untimely, and to all Satan is ever ready to suggest excuse, by the lack of fitting opportunity. Many a sinner lingers long to hear a word in behalf of his soul, when a Christian friend is regarding the moment as untimely. Nevertheless, there are occasions when effort might be as the casting of pearls before swine.

Private access to men, is usually more efficient than public. The presence of others often fortifies the heart against serious impression, and human pride disdains to feel its first humiliation while the world is looking on. A single word casually dropped, often affords an introduction to serious discourse, and at least enables us to judge how far just then we may seek to present divine truths personally to the sinner. Seasons of personal, family, or business affliction, often afford favourable opportunities, in which the world unclinch its grasp, and leaves the heart more penetrable by the arrows of conviction.

The great point with the Christian, so far as his own growth in grace is concerned, is to be seeking the opportunity. In business relations, those with whom it is for our interest to confer we are apt to seek, and by degrees come to know when, and how, and where it is best to approach, in order to accomplish our wishes. A faculty of discernment thus cultivated, at length magnifies itself into the proportions of an apparently special gift; and a great faculty of business or of personal address, as it is called, is thereby acquired. With the blessing of God, the same kind of diligence will avail even more in the business of the soul. We need by a similar process to cultivate the doing-good capacity. If our minds are attracted to the service, if interested for others, seeking opportunities to make

lasting, serious impressions, our own hearts become so operated upon as to acquire a faculty of spiritual execution, which makes a privilege of a duty, and so acts upon our own souls as to make them alive for Christ. Oh! the blessed influence of this state. How the formal Christian, or he who ever feels the duty, without having stirred his faith to the exercise of it, sighs for the ease of those who are at work for God. There is less difference than we suppose in the capabilities of Christians for such service. The unlettered peasant is sometimes eloquent with holiness, when the educated and accomplished scholar erects icebergs from which no particles of melting warmth ever drop into the soul. The mild sympathies, the tender kindnesses, the prayerful plans, and the good deeds of plain Christian zeal, often take their place beside the spoken word, as well as more pretending aims of the learned; and thus none are left without a method. Grace and a desire to grow therein are the only essential requisites.

2. The effort as a means of grace-culture must be from the heart, as well as to the heart.

This is the great need of all. We do not warm others, because we are, ourselves, too cold. We hesitate, because our own vitality is not exuberant. We draw back, because we do not grasp by faith as firmly as we should. But from a hearty desire, acquired by meditation and dependence on God, use the fire that is in thee to kindle another, and thou too shalt be warmed. The little spark that may gleam out in another, may reflect light upon thyself, and even the stony heart may through the spirit be as a flint to bring out the glowing of thine. The only kind of heart-friction the Christian can be benefited by with the worldling is just this. Even a failure is an exercise of moral courage, and a triumph of applied duty,

which deserves not the name of failure. But in order to this, it must not be an isolated experiment, an evanescent emotion, but a hearty, indwelling zeal. We must feel a full interest in the soul addressed; not merely in the man, but in his soul, not only on his own account, but because Christ died to redeem it; because sin is rebellion against God, is so infinitely wicked, that justice requires its punishment in the sinner, if he does not accept the only Saviour; because gratitude for our own deliverance requires the effort, no less than the love which we have for a fellow-mortal. Here are the well-springs of this grace. We need to think upon these things, so that it may be a heart-act. If not, egotism, hypocrisy, fondness for the conspicuous, a love of trying human skill on merely human sympathies, may creep in, and zeal without knowledge, blast, instead of bear, fruit to one's own eternal life. But with the caution and the earnest desire from the heart, there is little danger of this; and when thus from the heart it generally makes some impression on the heart; but even if not, the spirit vouchsafed seals it to our grace.

There is often on the part of Christians an unfounded assumption, that they will offend those in whose behalf they labour, which deters them from effort for souls. Whom did you ever offend in this way? If any, can you not see self-reliance, or injudiciousness to account for it; or even if real or unavoidable, shall one rebuff offset an hundred welcomes? Verily, I have been ashamed of myself, to see how respectfully kind words or efforts on this subject are received by the careless, and seemingly unconcerned. Seldom have those who, in private, have been most faithful, had occasion to complain. We have the record of the plainest, as well as the most learned, in their abundant successes, not only in converting souls, but in rivers

of refreshment to their own renewed hearts. God is better than our fears, blessing us in what we attempt, without judging us by what we accomplish. The difficulties are often like mountains amidst winding roads, seeming at a little distance to lie like huge obstacles ; but cleft for us in our advance. Underneath our feeble efforts, God puts his Omnipotency, and sends them as his messages to others, while with the added glory of his acceptance, he reflects them back upon us, abundant with more grace. Our progress in holiness secures us against the possibility of losing the reward.

3. The effort, in order to secure our growth, as well as to do others good, must be accompanied with prayer.

"Give me," said Archimedes, "a fulcrum on which to rest my lever, and I will move the world." Prayer is at once the lever, with the fulcrum attached, "moving the God that moves the world." We must never dis-associate prayer and effort. In the economy of grace, they are a conjoined unity. Prayer and effort, effort and prayer, are to permeate our every idea of work for souls. They are to intermingle and interlace, as the substratum and support of progressing holiness. The effort is to be dedicated and sanctified by prayer. A Christian for his own good should never make a personal effort to save a soul, without looking to God for aid. Not only is prayer to be followed by commensurate action, but action by commensurate prayer. Not of works, lest any man should boast ; but when we come with the effort before God and seek his blessing upon it, we place each in the true relationship, and in the very act secure for ourselves a grace-advance from God, irrespective of results. We achieve nearness of access for ourselves, whether we do for others or not. Remember that the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends ; and we have

in the record, proof that he exhorted them also. Alas! that so many have swung pendulum-like in discussions and theories about the relation of works and prayer. Lay hold of both together, and the subject will not trouble thee. Pray, and pray on, and prayer will assert for itself its true position; work, work on, and works will fit, like golden tenons, in the great frame-work of grace, without a friction or a jar.

We cannot systematically and sedulously make effort for others, with prayer conjoined, without ourselves being partakers of the blessing. We are promised temporal mercies as the Father sees fit to bestow them. But to spiritual favours there is not the same limitation, and in seeking these for others, we cannot, if we would, put ourselves in the position of indifference. By the fundamental laws of spiritual life, we are participants in the reward; and that is progress in grace. By parable and miracle, biography and experience, the Bible teaches us that they who labour for others are themselves benefitted thereby. The Christian, thus sustained by prayer and effort, will have a grace growth, an expansion, a life. How else can it be, but that one should thus be assisted to grow in grace? It is the natural outspeaking and outworking of the regenerated heart. Deny to your Christianity its prayer and a working sympathy for others' souls, and you send it back to its author, a pearl of great price undistinguishable from the worthless dross of worldliness. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. Use it to the uttermost, and with your own spiritual nature brightened by its effulgence, you will advance from grace to grace, and at last present yourself at heaven's gateway, radiant with grace grown to glory, made meet for the inheritance by the work itself, and per-

chance as the coronet of that glory, beholding those whom you have sought to save.

Thus for a time setting aside all the other weighty arguments for seeking to do good to others spiritually, in this one of our own religious culture, we see enough to commend to us the duty, to urge us to the privilege, and to lead us to value and improve it to the cultivation of our graces, and our own delightful increase. Letting the exercise of grace develope itself in its most natural way, you shall know more of the doctrine of Christ, and receive refreshment and replenishment from him who ever owns such labours as service for Christ. We have but to put it to the test in our own blessed experience.

CHRISTIAN CONVERSATION AND FELLOWSHIP IS ANOTHER
MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE, EVER TO BE HIGHLY
ESTEEMED BY THOSE WHO WOULD MAKE PROGRESS IN
HOLINESS.

“They that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and *the Lord hearkened and heard*, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name, and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.” Both the actual and implied relations of the children of God are such as to necessitate communion with each other in order to an unstinted progress in grace. Children of the same Father, redeemed by the same Deliverer, fed by the same Spirit, united by a common faith of which love is the alpha and omega, why need a word be said to insist upon such a principle? Love of the brethren, coexistent with the love of God, is the pure motto of the Gospel of salvation; and as both a result and a means of

growth in grace, cannot be too highly appreciated, or too fully exercised by the devout disciple. In the sentiment of Dr. J. W. Alexander we may say, "If there were but two human beings upon the earth, they would be, if they were of sanctified hearts, drawn to fellowship with one another." Unity of feeling and community of sentiment are the natural outgrowth of Christian hearts, and it is as reasonable for them to result in fellowship and interchange of thought, as it is for any moral cause to produce a moral effect. Growth in grace requires it, and in turn growth in grace is the yield. It is a law of reason which the law of grace multiplies a thousand fold. The sons of God, members of the same body, one heart, one hope, one aim, one family—is there not a ground of fellowship as certain and as indestructable as eternity. We do not mean to affirm that Christianity at once eradicates and overcomes all the impressions which we form, all the likes and dislikes of humanity; else grace in this respect would at once be perfect in its effects, and growth in grace therein an impossibility. But it does tend eminently among Christians to overcome alienation of feeling, to draw us to each other, and to bring every feeling of fallen human nature into subjection to this one principle of love. It exhibits itself in a respect for a real Christian, whatever may be his connection, his condition in society, or his personal benefit to us. It is not so sectarian but that it can overlook the differences of denominations wherever it can recognize the unity of the Spirit and the bond of faith. Though differing in minor points, it asks with Job, "Why persecute ye him, seeing the root of the matter is found." It is not so exclusive as to be bound by the distinctions of society, but at all proper occasions holds these as secondary to the social compact of religion.

It is the image of Christ we are looking for and loving; and

though poverty and lowly circumstances may surround it, it nevertheless has a charm which will not be separated from us by these. You may find the portrait of a friend amidst all the rubbish the world may have cast about it; but you will not rate its value by that. If you can but catch the expression, the heart-strings of sympathy are touched. It is more than this in spiritual attraction. There is not only emotion, but principle, love,—not merely as a result, but as an original part of soul-culture. We need to cultivate this in order that we may grow thereby. We are so much the creatures of circumstances, and so apt to form our own opinions and associations upon the basis of business, or local relations, that we may fail to carry out our real feelings. It is not necessary that we annul all the forms of society; but it is necessary that we be not bound by them, that we be ready to go out in love to those who are Christ's, that we be conscious of esteeming them in love for his sake, and be not ashamed to recognize them as dear to us by such a binding tie. This does much toward rendering our Christianity a growing practical power. It enables us to give efficient exercise to a spiritual trait, and illustrates it in a way conducive to personal holiness. He who is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, has given prominence to this, as a part of the evidence of our acceptance; and we in acquiring this must needs give prominence to it as a part of our growth in grace. This fellowship exhibits itself as a growth in grace also, by leading us to choose for our companions those who have the mark of Christ. So attractive is Christian character and conduct to the true believer, both from its very nature and from his own habits and consequent preferences, that it is impossible to conceive of a true Christian who would prefer the company of the ungodly. Were the

number of disciples very limited, and those with whom we are thrown in contact, possessed by nature of unprepossessing traits, though we should love them for all of the true image we could find, we might easily conceive that there might be a check upon the practical exhibition of the principle. But no such state of things exists. The range of Christian character is so great, the loveliness of its spirit so obscures smaller failings, and the diversities of association are so manifold, that it is a strange anomaly for a Christian to find his companions in the world, and to be most found at the world's meeting places. He who enjoys best the purely carnal fellowship, who sits in the counsel of the ungodly, and listens to the levities of unholy men, knows nothing of the grace-culture of that fellowship where the good things of the kingdom are in view, where the prospects of fellow travelers to a better country are the theme of discourse, where there is a union of hearts cemented by the hopes of endless, peaceful companionship, and where through Christ as the friend that sticketh closer than a brother, "we have access by one Spirit unto the Father, and are not strangers but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Alas! that some who bear the Christian name, stint their growth in grace by the former process. They distinguish little between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not. Though avoiding the company of those whom the laws of society consign to its lowest grade, they nevertheless cherish and court the friendship of those who pay only external respect to the gospel. We do not by any means feel disposed to urge an unjustifiable, or unnatural selection. There are many reasons why the unconverted should be treated not as enemies, neither with coolness or reserve. But there are also reasons direct from God, why

they should not be chosen friends. Our fellow Christians should at least be able to discern the evidence of a superior attachment to piety wherever exhibited, to see us drawn in love to those who most thoroughly exemplify the doctrines of the Gospel, and to know that in every good word and work they have our sympathy and co-operation. Imperceptibly, if not always perceptibly, we influence each other, and sooner or later our companions leave their mark upon us. If our fellowship is with the righteous, we are in the way to grow more righteous; but if chiefly with the careless, evil communications will corrupt good manners; we shall not escape the impression. It is ominous, it is hazardous, when the Christian's chosen ones are of the world, and when other assemblies and communings are preferred to those of God's people. Many are thus led away from the strictness of the faith; the young, by thoughtless companions; the middle-aged, by business friends; and the aged by those hardened in worldliness.

They not only lose the grace developed by the company of the righteous, but in its place procure the mildew and blight of this chilling coldness. Let us, instead of this, strive to make progress with others in the divine life, by choosing the sweet associations of kindred holiness, which ought to be no less a firm compact of friendship than a covenant of love.

But admitting that we choose as companions those who have separated themselves from the world, there is still another point in which we are not apt to avail ourselves of a means of growth to its full extent. Notice that the fellowship referred to was a communicating, outspoken fellowship. As Christians we are to edify each other by personal conversation on religious subjects. Such communications are a means of growth in grace,

1. Because they have a tendency to keep our mutual spiritual interests more prominently before us.

There is need thus, for our own good, to familiarize ourselves with our religion as a real part of our acquaintance with others. Those things which are seldom mentioned in our daily life are apt to be forgotten ; and so in our religion we have occasion to cultivate a freedom in talking with our spiritual connections on the one grand theme of mutual absorbing interest. The habit of interchanging feelings brings out soul-culture as a part of our daily concern, pleasantly associates it with serious reflections, and intelligent spiritual views are thus exchanged, which give to the mind and thoughts such bias as better enables us to improve everything for advance in holiness. Religious interest and emotion altogether concealed, is like any other emotion unnaturally restricted. Next to the outgoing toward God, where else shall it find healthy expansion, if not in converse with those sharing the same faith, hope, and peace. Our own spiritual natures thus are not kept as a hidden thing, an idea without a form, but are felt to energize us by the power of a clothed expression. Form without formality is conducive to the practicalizing of religion, and so when from a full heart we converse about the matters of the kingdom, not as disputants, but as those growing in knowledge and desiring to be fed, a holy familiarity with those of like spirit conduces to a personal spiritual-mindedness.

2. This intercourse conduces to growth by acquainting us with all the peculiar phases of Christian experience.

Next to knowing God and ourselves, a knowledge of the soul-experience of our fellows is greatly valuable. It is in fact by thus knowing each other, that we may often better understand ourselves and our God. The Christian life is a study, as

well as a faith. In order to grow in grace, we need to know the way in which God deals by his Spirit with his own people. How often in Christian intercourse is an experience related, or a train of thought suggested, which throws a new light upon our own evidence, which gives us new courage to resist temptation, and incites us to a more unwavering trust, and a more correct practice. By such fellowship and conversation we are brought within visual connection with each other, often with a benefit to self. There is no way at times so efficient of relieving our doubts and fears, as to lay them before a Christian brother, and receive his views upon them. It forms no unimportant part of our spiritual education. In this way God answers our prayers, by making fellow mortals like ourselves angels of mercy; thus bearing one another's burdens, we fulfil the law of Christ. By the richer or more varied experience of others, through the blessing of God, we are led to see more of the methods of grace in its human working; and are taught to grow to a more firm and expansive stature.

3. By Christian conversation, the fire is re-kindled in our own hearts, so that the flame of love glows more brightly, and thus we grow in grace. As did the hearts of the disciples when Christ conversed with them, so may they who are of his mind, have their hearts burn within them as by the way they talk of the good things of salvation. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a Christian man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Alas! that our graces should become scaled over with the world, but if so, thus rubbing them together we may polish them, without any danger of reducing them. It is only the rust that will wear off, while the pure steel will brighten by the exercise. God has made us keepers of our brother's spiritual interests, that we may the better cherish our own. By the

words of another, a familiar truth is often presented in a new light, an old Scripture strikes us with peculiar power, and the earnest voice communicates a real felt sensibility. A dormant grace may thus be awakened, a faltering courage sustained, and the flame of love grow brighter on our own heart's altar. The prominence given by the Gospel to preaching is a full illustration of the importance attached to the verbal communications of man with his fellow. The sympathy of nature becomes sanctified by the comminglings of grace, while the presiding sympathy of Jesus fastens the soul more affectionately to himself. The bonds of Christian intercourse are higher, nobler, more endearing than any other ties. The love of God in the heart needs spoken words for its full developement. It loves its neighbour, and especially those of the household of faith, with an ardour which seeks expression, and finds it in the sweet interchanges of Christian experience. A part of the education of the mind, is converse with the gifted and refined; and no less a part of the education of the soul is converse and companionship with renewed hearts. Union and consultation are important for ourselves in respect to the interests of this world; it is far more important in reference to the all-absorbing essentials of the next. It may be difficult to secure it in an appeal to the worldling, but between us and a fellow Christian the middle wall of partition is broken down. There ought to be no awkwardness or embarrassment here. We have stood at the foot of the same cross, acknowledge the same Head, and love the same Saviour. We are members one of another. The introduction is complete. We are presented by Christ. The paramount interest of the one is that of the other. Christ is all in all. We are co-partners in a theme transcendently glorious. Shall we talk with each other glibly on the minor

affairs of news, business, or friendship, and never speak words about grace? By conversation together on other points, we awaken interest in ourselves. Can we not do the same in spiritual affairs? There is an enkindling of love in the process. It is an act which adds to our faith, virtue, and knowledge, which warms the heart, enlivens the principles of religion, and gives culture to those graces which promote our advance in the divine life. We are not to let slip such a natural, easy, and familiar method of soul-expansion.

4. As a means of making the Church more useful to the world, Christian conversation is a means of nourishing and increasing grace in ourselves.

We have already considered how anything in our own experience which brings about such a result has to do with our own spiritual progress. In order to carry on the work of the Spirit in the world, the co-operation of each individual member is desirable. If not essential to the final triumph of the Gospel, it is essential to an exalted attainment in Christian character. We have this work to do for ourselves, as well as others, and we cannot do it most efficiently alone. First, the great God himself, must, and will be, our helper. One of his appointed ways of assisting us, is to incline and enable us to assist each other. The weak brother must be helped by the stronger, the lingering disciple urged along from the city of destruction, the temptations of another battled off by the weapons of our warfare, and the glory of it is that it is a self-strengthening process. Grace is added sufficient for our day. The more we use, the more we have for use. If on the other hand, as is often the case, we are the weak, we may gather strength from the strong, and from the experience of others, get knowledge how to understand the darts of the adversary,

and having done all, to stand. Thus comparing faith with faith, and looking to Christ as its Author and Finisher, we shall be more likely to obtain a good degree and great boldness therein. We develope a power which has no right to be dormant, but which must needs be ever enlisted on the side of religious advancement. The principle of fellowship and conjoint action which necessitates holy conversation as one medium thereof, is more powerful in this aspect than any other

When two Christians unite with mutual prayer, fellowship, and conversation in a spiritual object, their power is not merely doubled. Even in a mere worldly view one strength may be utterly unavailing against a fortress, while a double force may batter and crush it. But in the kingdom of grace Christian fellowship multiplies a power by a power we cannot calculate, because limitless as its Author. The reaction upon self, too, is as fruitful in promise of blessing as the effect upon others. If those with whom we have holy fellowship, have a fuller experience, and have attained a higher standard than we, by the law of influence, and by what we may see of the mode of attainment, we are encouraged to press on. If we find others whose piety we have learned to respect, assailed like ourselves, yet struggling and overcoming, our courage is renewed. If we find still others annoyed with conflicts and doubts which no longer distress us, we know that in giving to these in the name of a disciple, the reward is sure. Thus, in every case there is good warrant for increase of grace. The Christian church, with God's blessing upon it, relies upon such a principle for its growth and developement, until mere numbers cease to be the test of its efficiency with the world about it. It is not only alive and progressive, but aggressive. It knows how to wield the sword of the Spirit. It comes to the unsubdued heart and

speaks to it with the next highest power to that of the love of God, as it summons it to "behold how these Christians love one another." That which is the power of the church for the advancement of the work of grace, is alike a power to its individual members for their nurture and expansion. Where the spirit of Christian unity is wanting, the efforts of believers for themselves, as well as for others, are too powerless. A kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation. It is not an efficient Christianity. The germ may be there, but if so, it has never burst the kernel; and until it does, not only is doing good to others a sleeping ideality, but one's own growth in grace is dwarfed. A blessed source of spiritual fertility is overlooked. Next to communion with God, conversation, fellowship, and attachment to his children, are the most natural outgoing and upgrowing of the renewed heart. Oh! how important for us in our own experience to develop the true idea of Christian fellowship as a prominent part of our spiritual enlargement. It pleases God; it does good to ourselves, to fellow Christians, to the church, to the world. The very statement, so indisputable is the fact, makes the argument complete. It is indispensable to full growth in grace. It is to be cultivated that we may acquire acquaintance, freedom, affability with each other as Christians; that we may join hands by that holy sympathy which blesseth the one who extends and the one who receives it, and that we may obtain grace-culture from effort for others. For how can we expect to speak freely with others for Christ, when we never are free in conversation and fellowship among ourselves. We approach others with the language of the farm, the workshop, the counting-house, and the council-chamber, because we are interested or desire information; and when imbued with the same motives to interchange

the language of religion, the seeds of grace are growing. It is, in reality, chiefly by such intercourse that the love of Christians for each other, puts itself in a form to command our own recognition as a joyful, hearty, unrestrained emotion, emanating from a spirit regenerated by grace. We are not only marshalled under the true banner, but our attachments prove us to be just where we belong. A power is developing itself which reaches the heart of a fellow Christian, and of another, and another, until through us it penetrates the heart of a sinner, carrying with it the light and warmth of Christianity. Yet not this alone, for in blendings of love, it comes gleaming back upon the souls first cultivating it; and this communion of the saints is felt to be a culturing of grace, an upbuilding in holiness, a source of enriching spiritual fulness, a sweet foretaste of a heavenly joy. God himself is ever amidst such fellowship with the dispensation of his grace.

CHAPTER XI.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE

(Continued.)

WATCHFULNESS—OBEDIENCE TO THE LAWS OF OUR NATURE—A RECOGNITION OF THE TRUE RELATIONS OF OUR WORLDLY BUSINESS TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE—PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY.

WERE there no other methods of growth in holiness save those we have already noticed, joyful and devout thanksgivings might well fill our souls, in view of the ample provision our heavenly Father has made for our spiritual nourishment. Each of them separately considered has in it a freeness and fulness, which leaves the would-be stationary Christian without excuse, and which cannot but incite the earnest soul to a diligent use of the abundant, instituted methods for spiritual culture and enlargement. Overwhelmed by a sense of the mercy of God, we might pause in wonder and love, crying out, it is enough, while we seek by a rich experience to know the blessedness of appreciating these. But we are not to limit the Master of the feast in the variety of its appointments. Besides all these, other means of progress are vouchsafed to the people of God, and as such, are worthy of our notice, that “always having all sufficiency in all, we may abound to every good work.”

I. WATCHFULNESS AS TO CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE AND CONDUCT IS FREQUENTLY INSISTED UPON IN HOLY WRIT, AS CONDUCTIVE TO VIGOROUS SPIRITUAL LIFE.

“ Watch and pray,” is the oft-repeated injunction impressed upon those who would make high attainments in holiness. Growth in grace requires that we should be fully alive to the vocation to which we are called, and no item of it is more important than that relating to the Christian’s daily walk. There is a power in the consistent, unobtrusive, Christian example, not only eloquent in its voice to unconverted men ; *but it sanctifies*, and He bestoweth his grace more abundantly. It is possible to talk and write Christianity, without feeling it ; but to live uniformly, watchfully, studiously, the correct holy life, is an elevating test to which to bring our hearts. The Christian is, as he is meant to be, a light, a city set on a hill, but if unwatchful of self, the glow of his piety is too likely to be obscured.

It is not when on watch that the sentinel is likely to be encompassed ; and it has been so ordered that the Christian on watch cannot be taken. Through the blessing of God, awake, alive, circumspect, he is impregnable. Eternal vigilance is not the price, for Christ has paid that, but it is the condition and security of his liberty, safety, and growth. Sin is not only a roaring lion, but a lurking foe. Unless we are ever on the guard, like a stealthy viper it will creep into the garden of the redeemed soul. How sublimely persuasive and timely was the admonition of our Saviour, “ Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” “ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, *be strong*,” is the concise and connected counsel of Paul to the Corinthian Christians. To Timothy, whom he

would have abounding in a fulness of grace, as an example to others, he says, "Watch thou in all things." We know not at what hour the thief cometh, and therefore we must ever watch, if we would not suffer the house to be broken through. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." There are practical elements for growth in grace in such a circumspection of self.

(a.) *He who, looking to the Holy Spirit for aid, is ever on the alert as to his example and conduct, is by the very effort, made to aim at a higher standard of excellence.*

He will see the deceitfulness of sin and the inefficiency of his own self-trusting resolves. He will feel that watchfulness must begin at the closet, that watching unto prayer is the introduction to a blessed experience. Thus brought to a fountain of life, to a true source of growth, he will be nourished more abundantly.

(b.) *This watchfulness begets a conscientiousness, conducive to purification and growth.*

In nothing do those not Christians more pointedly condemn themselves, than by the ability they show in detecting inconsistencies in the people of God; for thus they exhibit a discernment between right and wrong which criminales themselves. But that which to them is a savour of death unto death, is to the Christian watchman, a savour of life unto life. To him it becomes a watchfulness over self, in order to a more blessed acquaintance with God. Thus sin in all its varied forms is recognized, not as a thing to be indulged, but as an evil to be overcome. The bosom sin is searched out, that it may be driven from its lurking place. The heart becomes educated

in the discernment between right and wrong, and where it seems difficult to decide, it becomes so satisfied of the odious character of disobedience, that in a doubtful case it decides against the risk of sinning. He that doubteth and doeth is already condemned, but he that resists is blessed. There is grace-culture in that watchfulness over self which can make the prayer of the Psalmist ours; "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "Past feeling" is the greatest calamity that can happen to a sinner, and a dull conscience is the saddest drawback to a growth in grace. Christian watchfulness is the specific antidote to the sleep of the soul. Turning our eyes to behold the truth, we will see Jesus, who is ever ready to guide those who watch themselves, in order that nothing shall separate them from the love of God.

(c.) *If not watchful as to our example and conduct, we are not likely to do good to others, and are thus deprived of a means of growth in grace.*

The world is a shrewd observer. However much we may recommend religion by spasmodic efforts, or eloquent appeals, all will be lost, if the daily walk gives the lie to the profession. In religion as in every thing else, actions speak louder than words. The most delightful defence of the religion of Christ, is to live it. The highest attainment in grace is that growth which enables us to present to those around us a model of Christian character. Fruits and faith, belief and works, profession and practice, have so intimate a relation, that we cannot dissociate them. They act and react on each other. Progress in the one, involves corresponding progress in the other. Spiritual watchfulness is the guardian angel of them all, and

secures that godly walk, which by making us more useful to others, makes us more fruitful in grace to ourselves.

(d.) *Christian watchfulness, as to our example and conduct, leads to self-denial for Christ's sake, and thus furnishes another grace-growing element.*

He who cultivates an accurate knowledge of self, and endeavours to have a conscience sensitive of right and wrong, will often have to undergo crosses and worldly privations, which others never experience. Points of interest, and sometimes of right, in secular and pecuniary matters, may have to be yielded, in order to maintain influence for Christ. The indignant retort, the quick blow, the impulsive gesture, and all the uprisings of revenge, may have to give way to the guarded answer, or the quiet endurance; but if so, it is a victory. Such denial of self for Christ's sake, such watchfulness lest we sin, will never pass unrewarded. Accumulating grace will be the precious blessing from Him who will cause all things to work together for our good. They who are on the alert, to avoid even the appearance of evil, who are unwilling to be even the occasion of sin, who forego what otherwise would seem innocent indulgence, lest a weak brother may be offended thereby, who are watching their own souls as those that must give account, are in the very act, overcoming the world and the wicked one. It is true, there is the possibility of a false scrutiny, a conscientiousness which looks at the anise and cummin, and forgets the weightier matters of the law. But he who, in the exercise of the other means of growth, adds to them this of Christian watchfulness, will not be very liable to fall into such a snare; or if he does, will usually not find it difficult to judge what is right and truth, or to determine his own course of action in relation thereto. If the watching is

not a mere resolve of the mind, but a spiritual exercise, not a mere looking into self, but a looking away to Jesus, that we may have a standard of comparison, and a source of holy aid, then it is a circumspection in which grace reigns, and by which grace-culture will be heightened. This is the Christian watchfulness which the Saviour and saints have commended, and one of the means of cleansing the defilement of sin. Thus keeping thy heart with all diligence, out of it shall be the issues of a vigorous, spiritual life.

The circumspection thus noticed, is not an attribute fully conferred at the time of conversion ; but God has nevertheless furnished us with helps to secure it. The power of holy habit is sanctified as a means to our advancement ; each past triumph gives double power for future resistance ; duty becomes natural ; and this self-denying carefulness is crowned with the joy and peace of a reasonable, delightful service. Like a well-tended garden, or a well-watered plain, a luxuriant fertility of grace is secured ; and “ watching with all perseverance ” the self-denial blossoms, with sweet blessings, and “ watching with thanksgiving ” is the happy, grace-advancing thrift of the soul. “ Blessed is he that watcheth.”

II. A CAREFUL OBEDIENCE TO ALL THE LAWS OF OUR PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND MORAL NATURES, IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT AID TO GROWTH IN HOLINESS.

The service of God is not a service of the affections alone. It is to be with the heart and the soul, the mind and the strength. It has been the error of some Christians to regard too much the state of the feelings, without seeing to it that grace is sought to guide, and overrule, and grow amidst all the exercises of which our humanity is capable.

(a.) *Our physical state has to do with growth in grace.*

Spiritual depression, listlessness, want of holy enjoyment, may to some extent be due to certain conditions of the body. The Christian who neglects his health, who is guilty of indiscretion in eating and drinking, who sins against the body by erroneous physical habits, makes the sensual and corporeal an embarrassment to the spiritual, and clogs the soul with unreasonable hindrances to the attainment of the lofty altitudes of grace. Hence, in the list of grace-progressing virtues, in the additions to faith and knowledge, temperance stands high in prominence, and the lesson is often plainly taught, that in the government of the appetite and the general control of physical life, piety must have its presiding sway. In fact, just here, it is practically needed. There are some Christians whom it becomes to bring their religion to bear on their appetites and bodily propensities, as upon darling sins. The corporeal must be kept under by the controlling argument that over-indulgence will interfere with progress in grace. The inefficiency of all those systems of reform, which have their basis only upon the requirements of morality, both prove the necessity, and by the contrast show the power of religion, to bring the members of the body under the discipline of the spirit, and make all fitly joined together, to conduce to the edifying of itself in love. If we would be grace-prospering Christians, the physical man must be under the law of grace. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God; and he who for conscience' sake has his physical self under control, not only acquires a discipline favourable to advancement, but the very principle involves a growth in holiness. It brings the body in subjection to indwelling grace; thus the great obstacle to growth becomes a help; for ours is a religion which

"sanctifieth to a purifying of the flesh." The glutton, or immoderate sensualist in any form, must not expect to grow in grace, until the code of his religious profession is made to apply to daily life, so that the carnal is submissive to the spiritual. Then the body is an instrument of grace, a medium of spiritual progress, an implement for growth-culture, a fit temple of the Holy Ghost. The body as well as the soul is thus recognized to be sharer in the resurrection of the just, and to rise a glorified body prepared for the inheritance of the saints.

(b.) *But no less is the intellectual to be made a means of advance in grace.*

God is the supreme of the intellect as well as of the heart. The mind exercised in obedience to the laws of grace, has much to do with progress in holiness. Knowledge sanctified is power immense for spiritual growth. It is significantly associated with it in the references of holy Writ. We are to increase in "grace and knowledge." "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." To sit listlessly down, and expect the Spirit to advance us in grace, without any intellectual effort on our part, is not the law of intellect in its relationship to redemption. Progress in religion is good mentally as well as morally. The God we adore is the highest expression of sublime, omniscient mind, as well as of complete holiness. Our reason is to be used as a promotive of our piety. It is the handmaid, not the rival of spirituality. It is given us for the express object that we may glorify God thereby. There are two extremes of error as to human knowledge in its bearing on spiritual progress, into which men are liable to fall; and both alike arise from a disobedience of the laws of our intellectual life. One class affects to despise all knowledge, looking to spirit-force as not only the power but the instrument of growth;

trusting to the feelings, and not even remembering that reason has an influence over these ; in fact, endeavouring to conceive of all religion as originating and ending in an exercise of emotion, independent of any mental or physical influence. Such seem almost to act upon the motto of heathen superstition, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion," and pride themselves upon their faith according as it is without knowledge.

Another class are wont to rely upon human intellect, exalting it above, instead of using it as subject, to the spiritual. They not only would reason, wherever reason can reach, but attempt to penetrate and scan that which is beyond her law or ken, and with the balances of time to weigh eternity. This is the knowledge which "puffeth up," which profiteth not, and not the knowledge of the holy which is understanding. It is for the Christian, who would have his intellectual nature conducive to his growth in holiness, to recognize the blessed track for intellect to trace, in order to add its glory to his culture for immortality. Like the body, it is to be in subjection to God. It is to be sanctified by the Spirit and prayer, and by a diligent use of the other means of growth. To the soul's education every part of man was meant to conduce, and the teachings of reason are everywhere in accordance with those of revelation. What it cannot prove, it cannot disprove ; what it cannot fully understand, it cannot explain by denial ; if resort is had to analogies or probabilities, it is far more unreasonable to doubt the plan of salvation, than to accept it. We rely very much upon faith in each other in the affairs of this life ; it is better still to have that faith which is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen, that faith of which God is the Author and Finisher, and of which growth in grace is the blessed confirmation.

To the poor, the despised, the ignorant; to the rich, the honoured, the learned, the Gospel is sent; and there is a kind of knowledge to which grace in the heart will ever lend a spiritual charm. The good man will desire to increase in knowledge, that he may increase in grace. Though not dazzled by the mere science of earth, he will gladly follow on to know the Lord, and will obey the laws of his mental nature, that he may gain a more thorough acquaintance with God. It is interesting to see how much in reality grace-growing men are intellectually developed by this very process. A love of God's word, thought upon his salvation and his providence in relation to us, and earnest effort after greater attainments in holiness, have raised many a man from intellectual ignorance to mental activity. He who is filled with grace, will desire a zeal which is according to knowledge, and in the exercise of the one will have an effective desire for the other. The Christian has no right to be a mental drone. He must study, he must speak, he must plan, he must think, for the cause of Christ. The very least he can do is to exercise the mind, with which God has endowed him, in such way as to obtain good to his own soul. The way of salvation has been revealed, the mind has been given us to understand this way, and to assist us in spiritual progress; and if we will but guide the ambition of knowledge by prayer, by reading the word, and by obedience to the faith, all will lend power and efficiency to practice, and *enable us to go on from one degree of strength unto another.*

(c.) *Obedience to the laws of our moral nature as a means of growth in grace is involved in the very idea of religious culture.*

To the Christian there is but one moral law, and that is the law of his Christianity. Obedience to it is the prin-

ciple, and growth in grace thereby the signal aim of his new life.

His morality is the fruit of his religion, the result of his union to Christ. He needs no argument to prove the propriety of earnest endeavours after obedience. Conscious of imperfections, he resolves in the strength of that Saviour who has atoned for his transgressions, to go and sin no more. Though the man of sin may still embarrass, he feels that he shall not prevail.

Thus, with the physical, intellectual, and moral natures, recognized as subservient to the one great end of perfecting in righteousness, we are to make a joyful obedience to each a means of spiritual progress, until the man entire is filled with the fulness of Christ. Thus there is an unreserved consecration to the service of God, and the fruits of grace thus exercised, shall even in this life gather into a rich and large reward.

III. GROWTH IN GRACE REQUIRES AN ABIDING RECOGNITION OF THE TRUE RELATIONS OF THE BUSINESS OF THE WORLD TO OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, HERE AND HEREAFTER.

A frequent error of practice, is the consequence of an error of reasoning upon this point. Even the Christian is too apt to use the term business as denoting something entirely distinct from religion, and independent of his moral duties, and thus to draw a dividing line between what is known as purely worldly, and as spiritual. But to the grace-thriving Christian, there is nothing purely worldly. The daily vocation of life has its religious character. Our business should be a part of our

religion, and our religion a guide in our business. Salvation is a practical thing beyond all others. It is applicable here in all human transactions, and hereafter is practically perfect in glory.

God governs not less in our temporal than in our spiritual affairs. He is the God of material as well as immaterial things. Sacred, and secular, are words in the dictionaries of men, but they do not describe contradictory or incompatible conditions in the economy of grace. It is a mistaken idea that we are to go about the duties of daily life, as if they were separate from the interests of the soul. In all our temporal affairs, we are stewards of the manifold graces of God, husbandmen employed in the vineyard of the Lord, trading servants entrusted with talents for which the Lord will call us to account.

Nowhere else do we so much need this impressed and settled view of the wide applicability of the grace in us, as in our worldly occupations. The net in which Satan draws the largest draught is that of unrestrained worldliness. Just where we are most exposed, do we need the guide, the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. Our religion is not a coat in the wardrobe, an outer garment to be laid aside at pleasure, *but a life*, a constituent part of our very selves, a rooted principle springing up to everlasting life. The Christian is to be recognized and is to recognize himself, on the farm, as well as in the closet; in the counting-house, as well as at the prayer-meeting; in the workshop, as well as the church; at the forum as well as the altar. The same dispositions and desires are to be practised at the one, as are implored at the other. Trades, occupations, industry, providing for the temporal wants of ourselves and others, are meant to be a part of our duty, and not to be an interference with progress in grace. The con-

verted man was never meant to be asleep in any of the grand organizations which contribute to the true prosperity of his family, his friends, himself, or society at large. All business effort is to be pursued as a part of a consistent spiritual life. There is nothing in the character of any legitimate occupation necessarily at war with a Christian walk and a godly conversation. Rather, these are to be used for growth in grace, and for impressing our religion upon those around us. Here we are brought in contact with others, here our principles leave their main stamp both upon ourselves and others; our barterings and bargainings, our plans and arrangements, need to be felt as subject to the inspection of Him who is supreme over all, blessed forever. We are to feel that we are pursuing our vocation as under God, regarding it as a department of the work he has assigned us, as having relation to spiritual prosperity here, and eternity hereafter. The very thought will lend a charm to every-day life, and prepare us better to endure the temptations which may surround us. It will tend to divert that spirit of selfishness to which all are so prone when brought in dealing with the world.

“Business” has its meaning in religion as well as in trade. “Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,” has a spiritual reference. If the first clause is quoted as the warrant for activity, the other two must not be forgotten. It is enough to astonish ourselves to see how ready we are to dissociate them. “Oh!” says Baxter, “the cursed madness of many that seem to be religious! They thrust themselves into a multitude of employments, till they are so loaded with labours and clogged with cares, that their souls are as unfit to converse with God, as a man to walk with a mountain on his back; and as unapt to soar in meditation as their bodies to leap above the

sun. And when they have lost that heaven upon earth which they might have had, they take up with a few rotten arguments to prove it lawful; though indeed they cannot. I advise thee, Christian, who hast tasted the pleasures of a heavenly life, if ever thou wouldst taste them more, avoid this devouring gulf of an earthly mind. Keep these things loose about thee like thy upper garments, that thou mayest lay them by whenever there is need, but let God and glory be next to thy heart." It is only by pursuing our regular vocation in life as the servants of God that we can do this. In it, we must ever recognize an overruling Providence. Hast thou great plans? They are worthless, if they lower thy standard of piety. Dost thou conceive bold undertakings to gain wealth or honour? If thou obtainest them without benefit to thy soul, remember the parable of the rich man (Luke xii. 16) whose ground brought forth plentifully. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." An untimely frost, a single fire, a night of storm, a stroke of disease, may in a few short hours disappoint the most cherished hopes. Or if success is won, and grace decays, what a miserable exchange and failure after all! One or the other is sure to be the case, unless the business of the world has its spiritual recognition, and is pursued in relation to a connection with present or immortal spiritual interests. "It is a good thing to be in the world, but it is a bad thing to have the world in us," was the remark to me but a few days since of a man once the most worldly of any I ever knew; but one who has been brought under willing subjection to this grace. In spite of resolves and effort, the world will be in us, unless religion pervades the business of daily life. Noble it is to do and dare noble things, to have energy in work, to show activity in undertaking and accomplishing; but it is only

noble, when God is recognized, when in all our avocations we exalt his praise, and seek to grow in holiness. Besides, we know not now as we shall know hereafter, how much this has to do with the secular blessings of life. The fortunate investment may be the answer to faithful effort in holiness, or the failure of cherished plans may be the forfeiture for worldly-mindedness, or misapplied means. Whatever the ungodly may do, the Christian cannot hope or afford to succeed in outward circumstances without this looking to his Lord. The soul cannot survive in health the carnal pressure, unless it ever feels its absolute dependence, and the all-presiding need of its professed faith.

Let us accustom ourselves to behold the business of this and the other world as co-ordinate and co-operative departments of the same grand scheme: not as separate, but as united and indivisible interests, bound together by the closest ties. The habit of ejaculatory prayer is especially beneficial in this view, as accustoming us to call upon God in every place, and to mingle our sense of Christian duty with that of daily life. He who thus pursues the business of this world, as relating to spiritual and immortal interests, places himself in a befitting frame for progressive growth in holiness. Thus the chief end of man, in all things to glorify God, becomes the practice of the sanctified one, and with such a pervading view of human relationship, growth is surely secured. In such a heart, *grace reigns*; and of its increase there shall be no end. The world with all its allurements is under control, and the business routine of daily life is made conducive to life's great purpose. So the effort of man is crowned with the presence and favour of God, the plants of righteousness are cultivated by the industry of earthly toil, and time is sanctified by the beauty of holiness.

IV. PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY FURNISH ANOTHER MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE, BOTH OF WHICH ARE IN TURN AVAILABLE TO THE UPBUILDING OF THOSE WHO ARE PROPERLY EXERCISED THEREBY.

A Christian friend of high attainment in grace, recently remarked to me, that he was not afraid of adversity, but he feared the temptation of prosperity. When the world goes well with us, and we have an abundance of this life, we do need to look well to the spiritual state, and measure the thrift of the soul. The allurements of prosperity are those which are included in worldly-mindedness, than which nothing is more likely to draw us away from the cross and from duty. We are so apt to rely upon our own strength, that too often we lean upon it, until we find it a staff which pierces the hand and pangs the heart. Human nature, when it fails, will give the blame to others, to chance, to God, to anything but self; when it succeeds, it calls itself independent, self-made, powerful. But grace teaches us another and a truer view. Its first lesson is that our sufficiency is from above. Prosperity should be a powerful auxiliary and means of growth in grace.

1. Because it should excite gratitude.

It is the goodness and the blessing of our heavenly Father, not meant as a snare, but to woo and win us to himself. The Christian who will think, cannot but see God as the Author of his prosperity, and finds in it occasion for that abundant thanksgiving which is best expressed by an increase in holiness. This is the thanks most acceptable to our Jehovah. Surely the goodness of God, if it can lead a sinner to the cross, ought still more powerfully to induce the saint to seek the fullest crown. Never did David more abound in spiritual love, and

joy, and peace, ripe fruits of prosperity, than when he surveyed the mercies of God and broke forth in those songs of gratitude which have ever since formed the cherished minstrelsy of the Church. To the sensitive heart, no view of our relation to God is more touching than that which presents us to ourselves as constantly dependent upon him, and he without money and without price, without stint, or effort on our part, showering his benefits upon us. Surely the finer feelings and sensibilities of a renewed heart must respond to such goodness; for it is enough to melt a stoic with love. We may resist persecution, inure ourselves to repel force; but who can withstand such love, when it comes as an addition to all the blessings of salvation? Many eminent Christians have acknowledged that no view made them so humble, grateful, and ambitious to do those things well-pleasing in the Father's sight, as a sense of obligation for his great goodness and mercy to them. Prosperity is from God, and should be an argument to every renewed heart, for growth in holiness. It is well for us often to recount our mercies before God, in order that we may appreciate them. Sublimities become common by contact, and unless we at times make it our set business to recall how much and how often we have been blessed, we are too apt to forget our indebtedness. One misfortune, is more apt to impress us, than a thousand favours, and men too often forget how large a portion of life, after all, is made up of good things. To most, the hours of pain, and suffering, and disaster, bear but small proportion to years of comfortable health and maintenance. God, even in the prosperity he lavishes upon his chosen in this world, proves himself a God abundant in mercy and love. It is by regarding our comfort and success in everything here, as a means for our spiritual advancement, that our soul's estate, as well as the

body, may prosper, and the temporal good we receive, be fed upon, as bread of eternal life, to nourish our souls. The mercies of God to us temporally, should be as Christ, manifested in the flesh, and make us to grow and "be joyful in the day of prosperity because the Lord hath done it." Where is the Christian who has not in his life received enough of blessing to prompt to growth in holiness thereby? Thus the sentiments of the beautiful hymn of Addison, should be often in our minds, and should be felt and practised in our experience.

When all thy mercies, O my God!
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

Unnumbered comforts to my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant mind conceived
From whom these comforts flowed.

When in the slippery paths of youth,
With heedless steps I ran;
Thine arm, unseen, conveyed me safe,
And led me up to man.

When worn by sickness, oft hast thou
With health renewed my face;
And when in sin and sorrow sunk,
Revived my soul with grace.

Ten thousand, thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart,
That tastes those gifts with joy.

Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue,
And after death, in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew.

Through all eternity to thee

A joyful song I'll raise ;

But oh, eternity's too short

To utter all thy praise.

(b.) *Prosperity is also a means of growth in grace, inasmuch as it provides facilities for usefulness to others.*

Success is as much a gift of God, as life, or health, or any other enjoyment ; and the rule of grace is, Freely ye have received, freely give. None ought to know and feel so well the luxury of being useful, and of growth in grace by doing good, as those whom God thus blesses with the means. Placing them above the seeming necessities of entire devotion to daily toil and providing them with time, talent, money, and other means of influence, it is not only reasonable to expect that others will be blessed as recipients, but that the giver, too, will share in the gracious benefit. He who is thus favoured, has much to encourage him in every labour of love. He may expect to see, and to be encouraged by results, as those who have but little to bestow cannot. If the widow's mite could bless her soul with good things in grace, how much more the money of the rich, the talents of the learned, the influence of the great, if in like spirit and devotion, they are dedicated to the service of God. If there is one above another whose position is almost to be envied in this world, it is he whom God has blessed with abundant prosperity, and with the zealous, hearty disposition to dedicate it to the glory of God. Oh ! there is something sublime in the view of the man abundant with the good things of this life, and then joyful in employing them in the service of God for the good of his fellow-man. In such prosperity there is growth in grace. What a contrast to the miser, whose very name is the derivative of miserable ! The

crowning happiness of success in this world, is in ever recognizing and employing it as a means of doing good, of glorifying God, and thus of enabling us to bear much fruit. Then prosperity is a vine of the Lord's planting, which bringeth forth abundantly to the satisfying of the soul with the increase of holiness.

But God is to be seen in adversity as well as in prosperity. Our trials as well as our blessings, may be so ordered as to be available means of spiritual increase.

Even from theory, we might find some reason for arriving at this conclusion. Adversity in its general acceptation has reference to a privation of some of the blessings of this life. But as temporal and spiritual prosperity are not identical, the absence of the one does not by any necessity involve that of the other. As they are too often antagonistic, we can readily conceive how temporal adversity may be spiritual thrift. Besides, the illustration of Scripture that no chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but rather grievous, and yet nevertheless, yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in those exercised thereby, and the comparison of the Christian to the child reprov'd that he may be the more faithful son, readily suggests to us how it is possible for affliction to be a benefit.

The true philosophy of affliction is plainly declared in the word of God. The adversity of the Christian, is directly intended for the nourishment of his grace. He doth not willingly grieve the children of men, and only in "faithfulness does he afflict his people." "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth," and that only for their more complete salvation.

Experience still more fully confirms what reason presumes, and revelation declares. How many have had reason to bless

God for their sorrowful days, more than for those they once called joyous? How many have lived over again the experience of the Psalmist. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." In fact, as we do not possess in this life the real tests between true prosperity and real adversity, we should be cautious in our judgments and decisions on these points. God alone can see the end from the beginning. Cloudy days, dark nights, stormy weeks, are accomplishing their work in maintaining the equilibrium of nature, in forwarding developement, just as much as the bright sun, and the clear sky. Had a mortal looked out upon the chaos of matter before the evening and the morning of the first day, he would have been impressed with its immense uselessness, yet out of its confusion come forth at a word, a blooming fruit-bearing world.

Though here there is a "crook in the lot," and the pleasant and sad seem mingled or are alternately lifted to the lips, yet we know only the part, and in grace as well as in nature, in adversity as well as in prosperity,

Each atom holds a place important,
In the scale of him who formed the worlds,
A place which lost, would leave a gap,
That grace itself would rue.

In several particulars it will not be difficult for him who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, more than for earthly pleasures, to see how affliction conduces to spirituality and growth in grace.

(a.) *It teaches us anew our dependence upon God.*

Overweening self-reliance is the great bane to spirituality. It hurled angels from Paradise to hell; and the saint on earth needs every caution to prevent it from again assuming sway.

Adversity, sharply it may be, but still directly, brings home this lesson to the heart. It is the natural antidote to pride and self-confidence. Continuous prosperity, although susceptible of spiritual improvement, might lead us to magnify the power of self, and to sit supreme and haughtily, as if the arbiters of our own fortunes. But when adversity prostrates us, when disease or misfortune folds a drapery of sorrow over all our self-confiding prospects, how touchingly are we taught to look to that God who knows what is best for us. When the little world of self thus trembles at its centre, and the near and dear seem involved in impending disaster, when honour, and wealth, and reputation, so far as the world is concerned, sink from their inflated proportions, to their own meagre dimensions, then we trust in God and grace rises to reign. So marked has been the experience of mankind on this point, that many, full of honours and all sensual gratifications, have conceived this as the only way to secure true sanctification, and have betaken themselves to the gloomy shades of the convent, or inflicted upon themselves tortures and sorrows, in order to obtain the benefits of adversity. But this is not grace-culturing adversity. It is when the Lord sanctifies it to us as one of his appointed messengers for good, as a teacher from him, as a discipline of the soul, that it is a savour of life unto life. However much it costs us to learn dependence upon Jehovah, we learn it cheaply ; for it is an introduction to grace, grace-growth, and glory.

(b.) *Adversity mortifies easily besetting sins.*

The sins to which mankind are most prone are generally those which administer to carnal pleasures and sensual delights. The soul yields more readily to these than to any other class of temptations, because present enjoyments are apt to

make more impression upon us than future hopes or fears. But when the hand of affliction rests upon us, then we learn that these allurements of the flesh, if gratified, do not furnish the joy and peace they promise. As they slip from our grasp, they teach us that the rewards of sin, even in this world are fallacious. The trial of your faith is thus made much more precious than silver and gold. Besides, in adversity we are often brought to see how these very besetting sins, so far from imparting comfort, are the real causes of our affliction. The good man, the longer he lives the more thoroughly discovers how much of his unhappiness is the result of his own mistakes and failures ; and thus learns to resist sin as the occasion of his sorrow. Providence thus uses our trials for our sanctification, and actually neutralizes the poison of sin, by showing us its own fruits, and pointing us to Christ as the great Comforter.

(c.) *Adversity promotes growth in grace, by impressing the conviction that religion is the only true source of consolation.*

When the streams of earth-born pleasure are dried up, to whom can we go but to God, the fountain of grace? Everything but religion is imperilled in life, and sure to be shipwrecked at death. To everything else, "*after that the Judgment*" is the toll and the knell sounding terrifically from eternity. Adversity the better makes us know and feel what the one thing needful is. Many Christian virtues are by it brought into lively exercise, which would otherwise be weak and undeveloped. Once called forth, they ever after aid in progress towards heaven. It is only under such circumstances, that we can let patience have her perfect work. In much long-suffering, the latent energies of grace in the soul are made active and fruitful. "Perfect through suffering," was not only the introduction, but has to do with the completion of grace in us.

As gems which are dug out of deep rocks by the hardest toil, so the graces of the spirit come forth as lights to sparkle and guide to an endless life. Learning to take religion as the only solace of life, we have our affections so disciplined, as to be made mighty in God to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan. The spirit of resignation to the will of God, becomes a delightful trust, a renewal of faith, a resting upon the arm of our beloved, and prompts to noble courage and advance in the divine life.

Afflictions, we may thus plainly see, if rightly improved, tend to separate the dross of sin from the heart renewed by grace, to mortify the corruptions of the flesh, to mingle with our tears of sorrow those of repentance and love, and add to the beauties of holiness. God's grace like a sun shining in among them, spreads anew the bow of promise over all the grand archway of our faith, and is the renewed sign and pledge of a covenant-keeping Lord.

While, therefore, it is proper for us to pray that it may not be necessary for God to afflict us, in order to bring us nearer to him, and that we may be wooed by his mercies, instead of driven by his chastisements, yet we must endeavour to be able to say,

"Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee;
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me."

It is better to see him in the cloud than not to see him at all; and we may be submissive to every dispensation, if thereby we are growing in grace and ripening for glory.

We are the more encouraged in this view, when we consider the recorded experience of those who have been eminent for

holiness. It was through much tribulation that prophets, and martyrs, and apostles entered the kingdom. There is no reason to believe that Abraham, David, or Job, Jeremiah, Stephen, or Paul, ever suffered in grace by the trial of their faith; but rather these afflictions were broad, safe stepping-stones to the New Jerusalem, in which there is no dark day, no need of the discipline of adversity, and at the portals of which a Saviour stands, who bids all sorrow and sighing flee away. Multitudes of saints in all ages have blessed God, that by the trials of this life, their growth in grace has been more eminently secured, and in their own grateful experience have proved that all these are allowed, because it is the Father's good pleasure that they should inherit the kingdom. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward is *renewed* day by day, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

CHAPTER XII.

MEANS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

(Continued.)

FREQUENT CONTEMPLATION OF THE REST THAT REMAINETH FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

I. THE FREQUENT CONTEMPLATION OF THE REST THAT REMAINETH FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD, IS HIGHLY TO BE VALUED AS A MEANS AND AN INCENTIVE TO GROWTH IN HOLINESS.

Amidst the toil and turmoil of life, the Christian's thoughts may rise to these highest scenes of holy joy, and find such meditation the true peace-maker to the soul. Unrest is the prevailing rule of human life. The worldling rocks to and fro on the billows of worldly fortune, never able to say of its things, I have enough, while the saint with higher hopes and better trust, as he sees the workings of an evil heart, cannot but feel desires for a better and a holier state. What a blessed privilege, that the heart renewed by grace, can mount above, and surround itself with the atmosphere of heaven. It is a pleasant sign, a fruitful source of growth in grace, when the soul delights to dwell upon that relation between God and his people instituted here, but only to be perfected in the world to

come. He who is accustomed often to feast upon the prospective glories of that state, cannot but get strength thereby. As sin cannot enter there, the nearer we get in holy thought, the more difficult it will be for sin to dwell in us. Satan is cast beneath our feet, and though he walk to and fro, up and down the earth, he cannot soar. It is a region more above his reach than any other. The mind fastened on sweet thoughts of the heavenly rest, is so prepossessed by grace, that growth is the inevitable result. It is feeding upon the pure manna, it is drinking from the water flowing beside the tree of life. There is no mixture of pollution here. It is a going out of the affections to the source of every good and perfect gift; it is an advance of the soul toward holiness; and this is the way to grow in fitness for its final undisturbed repose. Oh! what a holy calm comes over the soul! sweet with joy, and peace, and love, when, amid every vicissitude of life, the man renewed by grace can feel a refuge and a safety, can get glimpses and foretastes of the inheritance and the reward.

Consider in a few brief particulars how the thoughts of the Christian on heaven as his rest, conduce to his growth in grace.

1. It keeps before him a high Christian aim.

In order to attain heights in grace, as in anything else, we need to have a lofty and noble aim. And this is the mark of the prize. We are to consider this as the "heavenly calling, of which we are to be made the partakers." He who habitually is looking forward to this rest, cannot be earth-bound and grovelling. He is spiritually-minded, and that is life. The climax of faith is kept in view. There is a longing after the holy excellence of this glory. Such a soul is not content with spiritual mediocrity. It sees such comfort, such consoling

height, and length, and breadth, and depth in the fulness of God's mercy, that having tasted, it wants not only enough for a relish, but for a subsistence. On the wings of heavenly contemplation, it has risen to the place where God its Father dwells, where Christ its Saviour intercedes, and where the home of everlasting rest is prepared for its reception. More than ever the life which is by faith upon the Son of God seems worth living and striving for. We lift up our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our strength, and a sight of the "Delectable Mountains" inspires to energy and growth in grace, even though still we be amidst the heat and burden of earth. The high aim prompts the high endeavour. With the high and holy God as the helper, there will be a zeal after holiness. The Christian feels the dignity and glory of his purchased destiny, and the grandeur of the object will be the measure of his aspirations, and his aspirations the measure of his advance, and his advance the measure of his grace. Earth is thus made to him an outer court to heaven; his conversation, his thoughts, are there, and with the eye of a faith in exercise, fixed on such a destiny, he will go forward. His course will be as steady as his aim is high; and going on from strength to strength, he shall at last appear in Zion before God.

2. Thoughts of the rest of the people of God tend to subdue worldly dispositions and desires.

From whatever stand-point we view the two, the contrast is always in favour of the heavenly. Earthly misfortune feels it with wailing, and worldly success even yet unsatisfied, admits it with a sigh. Wealth, ambition, honour, fame, in melancholy strains confess, "Here there is no abiding rest." Yet the world, like a great Maelstrom, catches the thousands in its whirl, and the Christian too will be caught in some of its circ-

ling eddies, unless he is looking to another rest. But when this is kept before the eye of the mind, when fleeting time is weighed in the balance beside everlasting eternity, there is a plea against devotion to earth, and an attraction to the peace of heaven, which cannot be lost upon the converted heart. The Christian thus keeps himself in right relation to surrounding circumstances ; in the world, yet not of the world ; diligent in vocation and duty, yet not under the dominion of human occupations ; seasoning with the final hopes of grace, all the allotments of this present life, and by holy thoughts combining the life which now is with that which is to come. Thus the heavenly rest, like a covenant angel, meekly looks down from above, and with pitying tenderness, and mild restraint, moderates the love of the world that we may be more happy here, and more meet for the fulness of joy hereafter.

3. Thoughts upon this rest are a great encouragement to labour for Christ. There remaineth a rest. This is not the rest. This is the Christian's work-establishment. He here toils that he may do good to others, and get good to himself. We have already noticed how much material there is for grace-culture in abundant labour here. But there is danger of being weary in well-doing. A world is at enmity with the truth. The progress may be slow ; the reward, if judged only by seen results, discouraging. Even the sincere worker may need to incite his faith, and renew his devotion. Again the heavenly rest gleams out ineffable with encouraging attraction. Is the conflict with sin and Satan sometimes severe ? Is incessant watching, your daily necessity ? Is effort continually needed to keep near the cross ? Do you labour without seeing the fruit ? Has the bread cast upon the waters not yet returned ? Is the carnal heart so at enmity as to try your faith and tire

your exertion? Oh! be not discouraged. There is a rest, there is a reward; and when you obtain it, it will be a glory. It is nothing less than a crown. A fortune is not won in a day. The Saviour, perfected through suffering, sits on the throne, and surely the saint can endure a little toil, in order that he may become sharer in the rest. Surely, there is the greater encouragement to increase in grace by earnest labour here, when we know that such labours have an end in perfect peace.

4. Meditation on this rest is a means of growth in grace, because it tends to keep the Christian's good home in view.

The love of a good home is always a power against temptation. The attachments even to an earthly resting place, have in them a sympathy and purity we admire. The homestead where the father lives, if it was a good home, how the child away off on the billows, a pioneer in the wilderness, or roaming in foreign lands, turns his thoughts to it as the spot of joy, serenity, and peace! In the wayward wanderer, if you can touch his sympathy, his love for the home altar, the family table, the family companions of his youth, you feel there is a chord not yet ajar, and the gleam of hope brightens the eye that the prodigal may yet return.

But oh, the Christian's good home! The Father is there; the Saviour, the Elder Brother, is there; our best friends are there, and none but friends; and our love for them will surpass all human affection; and the angels are there, a great host which no man can number. It is the general assembly and church of the redeemed, and Christ has gone to prepare the place. It is the everlasting home, the perfect unending rest, and eternal friendship with God. Extend the blissful contemplation, and with prayer, thanksgiving, and praise, see if you must not grow in grace thereby.

5. Thoughts of this rest enable us to look upon death in calm reality, rather than with terrifying sadness ; and thus favour our progress in holiness. There is such a thing as being held in bondage by the fear of death. It is natural to dread to meet the great enemy, because in the " article thereof " there is pain and parting. In itself, it is the awful fruit of sin, and we are not expected to love it. But it is desirable, even on earth, to realize through Christ our triumph over it. It is by thoughts of the rest beyond the grave, that we are to feel that perfect love which aids in casting out this fear. The soul which has accustomed itself to frequent and thorough meditation upon its prospective immortality, passes down the decay of life, and comes to the hour of sickness and pain, differently even from the Christian who has never familiarized his mind with such a contemplation. His soul has been educated even in this last department of its earthly culture. Such a one may hope to grow in grace even amid the pangs of approaching dissolution. Death has before-hand been spiritually improved to the edification of the heart, not because good in itself, but because the harbinger of a true rest. The soul thus accustomed to thoughts reaching out and resting on the bosom of God in eternity, can say, " For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," and grow in grace by the calm, holy, sublime resignation it speaks. It is a resting on that rest which is grace-refreshing even in this life. Even in health it gives peace and serenity to the soul in its thoughts upon the final hour, and at last a triumph, not only over death, but in death. This is the victory that overcometh, even our faith ; and thoughts upon this rest thus enabling us to be better prepared and fortified for the intermediate event, in fact exemplify just this faith in blessed exercise. Thus having a loving " fear of God," and knowing

no other fear, the rest beyond made familiar to the mind by present meditations, not only sends the light of its blissful life over the chasm of the grave, and radiates the dying day with an opening dawn of peace ; but back along the path of life gives power to grace to see and feel its sway. So filled with the increase of righteousness, the soul in meditation on death, and judgment, and eternity can calmly grow in grace ; for beside them, it sees three other signs of comfort infinite. Triumph, justification by faith, a rest remaining for the people of God. The sting of sin is gone, grace reigns, its crown is in view. What need we more to incite to growth in holiness ? Without a growing holiness even the true Christian cannot be looking with the eye of a steady faith towards his blessed everlasting rest.

We have now in several chapters attempted to bring to view some of the varied means of grace which have been instituted by the great Head of the church for the perfecting of the saints in righteousness. Besides all these, there are others which may commend themselves to individual Christians, or be available under peculiar circumstances.

Time itself, with all its weighty responsibilities and its great opportunities, is to be valued and recognized as a means for growth in grace. In a diligent use of it, and a diligent seeking after all its privileges for grace-culture, he is to weigh and estimate it, in its solemn relationship to eternity. His whole life is to be measured by the rule of his faith, and his growth in grace.

But he who, with earnest prayer and self-sacrificing zeal, makes up his mind that the great business of his life is to grow in grace, and who enters upon the use of the means already considered, with a hearty determination to serve God therein,

will not fail to achieve such increase and victory, as will fit him to seek out for himself other avenues of grace, to avail himself of all the methods it is possible for him to pursue. Enough has already been said to introduce, and to some extent unfold, the importance of growth in grace and the methods for its attainment. May you and I, in reliance upon God, enter more fully upon this blessed work, and be prompted by these considerations, to seek after these treasures of righteousness.

In the use of all these means, we are to remember that these are only the methods of divine grace.

God is the power, these the instruments, polished, it is true, after the similitude of a palace, but still the instruments of his love. Christ must be the eye of our faith, and holiness the object of our search, and ourselves only the needy seekers and recipients of the bounty. These are the channels, through which God has appointed that rivers from the ocean of his grace should flow, and it is for us to accept the proffered methods, if we will receive the life-giving supply. These connect us with the fountain, and replenish our hearts with the abundance of his love. The means already noticed in their number, variety, and fulness, testify how ample are the provisions made, and how without excuse is the professing Christian, who is content to sit still, amidst such grace-growing bounties. I pray God, that these pages may lead us all to thinking, praying, working, as becometh the Gospel, that we may abound more and more in the increase of holiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

EVIDENCES OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

WE now turn from the means, briefly to notice the evidences of growth in grace.

After the various subjects and thoughts which have occupied us in previous pages, the distinct consideration of the evidences of growth, in detail, is not as essential as at first view, the importance of the evidence itself might indicate. The very means of growth, and the exercise of them are themselves the grand blocks of proof. They are the stones of the spiritual temple of our faith, which as we use them, are one beside another accumulating into a holy palace of evidence. Our love for, and delight in them, imprint a language which needs no interpreter. If faithful in their exercise, correct in their use, and looking to Jesus through them, we are all the time imprinting upon them and us, the law of Christian evidence, so plain that it enters in as a part of the growth. Evidence of growth in grace, like the evidences of many of the most important conditions of existence, is involved in the very nature of the exercise. There is many a man who, if called upon to prove his own identity, to demonstrate the plain admitted truths of his belief, would be at a loss to clothe in words the inmost utterance of his soul. So it may be in the experiences

of grace. He who is growing in grace has a consciousness of the indwelling power of the faith, knowledge, and love of God, which words cannot express. It is something to be felt, rather than to be defined. If you may describe, you cannot fully analyze it. The very attempt at logical proof, seems like a coming down from the sweet atmosphere of holy enjoyment, to the cold region of human reasoning. Like the patient patriarch of Christian antiquity, we almost feel like dismissing the demonstration of what to the grace-growing Christian becomes an axiom, and rising to the sublimer heights of a holy faith exclaim, "I *know* that my Redeemer liveth." The soul advancing in holiness knows its progress. They who are most in doubt about the evidences of their progress in holiness, too often have no evidence to find. We by no means would avow, that the real Christian may not, for a time, and occasionally, be perplexed in this respect, or may not have his faith clouded by his frailty and short-comings. But if he is really advancing, a survey of a sufficient epoch of time will not be without some signs of a healthy vitality, and a flourishing spiritual progress. Darkness will not be the rule of a grace-growing life. Indecision and doubtful evidence were never meant to be the surroundings of the renewed soul. We are not dealing with mysteries, when searching after the fruits of holiness. If we will only bring the same principles to bear, by which we determine our successes in life, the signs of health and vigour, or the proof that we are increasing in honour, influence, or power, and then add to it the aid of the Holy Spirit vouchsafed to them that ask it, we shall not fail intelligently to investigate our spiritual state and progress. Without a diligent use of the means of growth, I know not how to direct any to satisfactory signs of advance; while those

who live in active endeavour to increase by these methods of divine appointment, will hardly need a single word of direction. This tree of life being grafted upon the wild olive branch, the natural fruit is *evidence*. Yet as by the devices of the adversary, the sincere disciple may be for a time hesitating and embarrassed, it may be well for us to pass in brief review some of these signs of growth. Were we called upon to specify the seven most prominent and satisfactory evidences of spiritual increase, they would be these.

1. An increasing appreciation of the goodness of God, especially as exhibited in the infinite love which led Christ to die for our salvation.

2. An humble sorrow and increasing loathing of sin, as not only disagreeable, but a great offence against our best and holiest Friend.

3. Increasing conscientiousness; that is, a disposition to bring everything more and more to the test, "Is it right," and to be governed in daily conduct by a desire to please God.

4. A growing feeling of regard for those whom we believe to be true Christians, and a conscious attraction to them, not because of their ability or disposition, but on account of their piety, zeal, and devotion.

5. An ardent desire for the salvation of others, finding expression in effort therefor.

6. A habit and fondness for having the thoughts, in the midst of daily duties, rising up to God in petition, gratitude, and praise.

7. A sense of increasing pleasure in the private duties and exercises of religion.

It is not necessary to enlarge upon these. They commend

themselves to the redeemed judgments and feelings of every Christian, as having to do with progress in the divine life. It is sometimes best, in order to enforce truth, to propose principles and heads of thought, and then leave the reader by his own devout meditation to fill out the details. The matter of evidence is one in which each Christian must do the praying and thinking for himself. It is eminently his province to dwell upon the tests and guides, in his own contemplations. No descriptive language can impart the resultant joy and peace. Self meditation, self-inspection must be the resort. One must question himself. The emotion must be felt, it cannot be created on the spot. It is itself a growth, and where abundant, it is evident without a set search—a matter of course, part of the joy and peace of believing. It cannot, therefore, be obtained by a sigh and a wish. There must be an effort and exercise of faith. Just here is the value of the means of growth in grace; for these furnish the experience, and the experience the evidence. These are the blessed aids stationed all along that stream of grace whose outlet and inlet is alike the ocean of God's loving-kindness. Through these we must go to him who alone can give us either the grace, or the means and evidence of growth therein; and if we follow this order of divine Providence, we shall not come back unfed or unsatisfied. He is boundless in grace on purpose, that he may give more. If the stranger may come, and ask, and receive, surely the children shall not be sent empty away. There is no way of securing the evidence, without employing the means of growth. Thus coming to drink at the fountain, and to be fed at the table, we shall know that we have received of his abundance grace for grace. In this diligent use of means the evidence of growth will not be wanting.

A distinguished Christian who had passed the greater part of a devoted life in the service of God, and who not only gave evidence of piety, but knew what it was to enjoy to a high degree a growth in grace, has left us a record of what to him was the sweetness and proof of a blessed spiritual experience. He thus specifies the prominent particulars of a lively faith and a good hope through grace :

1st. An increasing appreciation of the glory of the method by which God saves sinners.

2d. A desire to glorify God.

3d. Pleasure and refreshment in the duties and exercises of religion.

4th. Increased sorrow for sin as an offence against God.

5th. A comfortable persuasion of my own salvation.

6th. A recognition of the various ordinances, as *the appointed means of obtaining* discoveries of the "beauty of holiness."

By the light of such tests, from one who has tried and felt them, again view thine own heart and see if such experiences are thine own. It is worthy of especial notice, that among those named is the very one which has formed the subject of many previous chapters. A recognition and use of the appointed means does indeed, in its very essence, involve and evolve the evidence of growth. To one in whom this grace has really been implanted, the path of duty, the use of means, the life by faith upon the Son of God, begets these holy exercises and enjoyments, which will not permit the soul to go groping all its days, but which will make light, and the knowledge of acceptance the rule, and cloud and doubt only the exception, in the sweet experience of the believer.

If you would desire still another view of grace-advancing

evidence, the elder Dr. Alexander, mighty in the sublime simplicity of Gospel knowledge, and in the use of the varied means of growth, in a review of a long life devoted to spiritual things, and with ripe culture and experience in grace, has thus specified and summed up the main indications of spiritual progress :

“ Growth in grace is evinced by a more habitual vigilance against besetting sins and temptations, and by greater self-denial in regard to personal indulgence. A growing conscientiousness in regard to what may be called minor duties, is also a good sign. Increasing spiritual-mindedness is a sure evidence of progress in piety, and this will always be accompanied by deadness to the world. Continued aspirations toward God in the house and by the way, in lying down and rising up, in company and in solitude, indicate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by whose agency all progress in sanctification is made.

“ A victory over besetting sins by which the person was frequently led away, shows an increased vigour in the renewed principle. Increasing solicitude for the salvation of men, and sorrow on account of their sinful and miserable condition, and a disposition tenderly to warn sinners of their danger, evince a growing state of piety.

“ It is a strong evidence of growth in grace when you can bear injuries and provocations with meekness, and when you can, from the heart, desire the temporal and eternal welfare of your bitterest enemies. An entire and confident reliance on the promises and providence of God, however dark may be your horizon, or however many difficulties environ you, is a sign that you have learned to live by faith and in humble contentment with your condition as one who has profited by sitting at the feet of Jesus. Diligence in the duties of our calling,

with a view to the glory of God, is not an evidence to be despised. Indeed there is no surer standard of spiritual growth than a habit of aiming at the glory of God in everything. That mind which is steady to the main end gives as good evidence of being touched by divine grace, as the tendency of the needle to the pole proves that it has been touched by the magnet. Increasing love to the brethren, is a sure sign of growth, for as brotherly love is a proof of the existence of grace, so exercising brotherly love is of vigour in the divine life. This love, when pure, is not confined, but overleaping all the barriers of sects and denominations, it embraces the disciples of Christ wherever it finds them."

It is not necessary that we should further multiply these indices of growth, or that we should devote a longer time to their elucidation and enforcement. If grace has taken root in the heart, and the *means of growth* have been diligently used in gracious dependence upon God, these evidences will be recognized, not as mere word-pictures, but as ambrotypes of personal experience; if not, the subjects of previous chapters are more appropriate for your devout consideration.

Betake yourself back to grace and the means for its growth before you seek to behold the growth itself. "First, the blade, then the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear." "By their fruits ye shall know them;" but there must be plants and culture. If the fig tree remains barren, year after year, it is a sure sign of death: evidence, but evidence, alas! in a sad direction. If none of the evidences of grace-growth are found, it is high time to awake out of thy sleep, it is so like spiritual death, thou canst not distinguish it. Hasten to the foot of the cross, crying, "God be merciful to me a sinner." As a repenting prodigal, use all the means of return. Perchance thou

wilt find thyself to be a son, although a wanderer; if not, now is the time for adoption, still there is room in the Father's mansion, still the overtures of salvation are proffered. It is not too late to secure grace, growth, and glory. These are not to be had by doubting or resting, but by striving to enter in at the straight gate. If some of these evidences are the comfort of the soul, then thank God and take courage. As the Christian life is a progress in growth, so it is to be a progress in evidence. It is not to be expected that those young in the course of grace, should have the fulness of all these signs. Yet do not dismiss too many on this plea; but by greater zeal and knowledge, multiply the proofs, by the attainment of the remainder. In surveying, he who goes fastest as well as he who goes farthest, will have the most signals of advance; and in the measurements of grace, progress is to be reckoned by the diligent use of means rather than by the lapse of time.

If most of the evidences of growth are with humble thankfulness thine, thou needest no effort of mine to estimate thy joy, or bid thee grow on. Thy soul has found its true element, sin is waning, and Christ, the Forerunner, is thy guide. The blessing of the new covenant has illustrated itself in the proof of a personal guarantee, and trusting in God, thou shalt go on from one degree of strength to another, until grace and its means, its growth, and its evidence, all joined in one, shall form the ever-widening circle of progressing holiness.

His grace will to the end

Stronger and brighter shine;

Nor present things, nor things to come,

Shall quench the spark divine.

CHAPTER XIV.

RESULTS OF GROWTH IN GRACE.

HOLINESS—HAPPINESS—HEAVEN—CONCLUSION.

SECTION I.

HOLINESS.

IN a single concluding chapter we now come to consider the results of growth in grace. Glorious as are the grace and the growth, these exceed them all. These are the infinite crowning excellence of its glory. It is not an erroneous judgment, which in any view of life, weighs acts by their consequences; and by such a test, this theme is wholly infinite. The culture of this grace, while it meets the approbation of all true present interests, preludes a glory which is beyond all measure. Its results are inevitably glorious and sublime. They include all that is possible in the temporal, and more than is conceivable in the eternal. They are at once the source of the highest comforts of this life, and the inexpressible felicity of the life which is to come. The ends and uses of sanctification, according to the "Scotch divines," are the evidencing of justification and faith, James ii. 18; the glory of God, Matt. v. 16; the showing forth of his praise, 1 Peter ii. 19; the adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour, Tit. ii. 10; the proving our union with Christ, John xv. 5, 6; the promoting inward peace and

joy, Ps. cxix. 165; 2 Cor. 6, 12; for maintaining fellowship and communion with God, John xiv. 21, 23; for making us meet for heaven, Heb. xii. 14; useful to men on earth, Tit. iii. 8; and to shame evil doers who falsely accuse our good conversation in Christ, 1 Pet. iii. 16. These are some of the direct results of this growth. Though uttered in a few condensed sentences, they contain volumes of meaning, and include a fullness which the meditation of all time could not exhaust. The contemplation of each, is like sitting down with the soul to a feast. It is on earth a prelibation of heaven.

If in another form you would condense the expression of the results of growth in grace into human language, you have it in these three words: Holiness—Happiness—Heaven. Upon what other source in the recorded humanity or experience of ages, can you predicate such results? We feel, as each word thoughtfully sounds forth from between the lips, that we have the three climax expressions of desirableness, and yet we know that the words themselves express but finite ideas of a far more infinite meaning. Holiness and happiness have to the grace-advancing Christian some actual realization in this world, and of them, as we have even here the gracious taste, we may from experience form some conception.

Progress in holiness is an advance toward likeness to God. As we were created in his image, as Christ died to obliterate the ruin of the fall, as the saint has Christ formed within him the hope of glory, and as the Holy Ghost is given as God in very deed dwelling in man, we have through grace both the motive and the power for increase in *holiness*. As our human natures are corrupt, it is a word of significance and power, only in that language of which the syllabled root is grace. Sanctification is indispensable, in order that this holiness, without

which no man shall see God, may be manifest, as an existing principle in our own hearts. As we read the history of salvation and the character of Jehovah in his word, his providence, and his works, we may get glimpses and theoretical conceptions of what holiness, as it exists in the Creator, may be. But it will give us no comfort unless besides we can discover branches from the everlasting Vine, like the arching limbs of the banyan tree, taking root in our own hearts, and there in turn growing up and bearing fruit, the same in substance, if not in degree. This is the will of God even our sanctification, and it is by this holiness, as the result of growth in grace, that sanctification can impart its holy satisfaction to the soul.

This holiness consists,

1. In communion and fellowship with God.

It has no other source. Separate the heart and the thoughts from God, and the very word is a blank. Without him it is not capable of existence even in idea. But joined to him, unfolded in his word, and represented by Christ in his sinless humanity, it becomes in part appreciable to the believer. Communion and fellowship is the real, established, intimate relation between God and us, set forth evidently by that holiness which results from grace-culture. We are thus in union with the Head and Author, and are made holy by becoming partakers of his holiness. This does not happen unconsciously and casually. There is a definite method and a felt relationship. We are brought nigh by the blood of Christ; kept nigh by God's blessing on our use of the means of growth; and through that holiness, which is the result, communion and fellowship are our privilege. Increasing holiness is grace in exercise, and this is that substantial and practical union with God, which is

the invariable accompaniment of growth in grace. We are thus made lively partakers of the fulness of Christ. The Scriptures are not sparing or constrained in their descriptions of this relationship. They betoken a *oneness* with Christ, a reality of *communion*, which groweth up with holiness here, and is a blessed foretaste of holiness hereafter. These are the two words which express the highest delights and exercises of the truest friendship on earth ; and they convey a still higher meaning as to the spiritual state. What a glorious result of growth in grace is holiness in this view, that it is holy familiarity with and knowledge of God ; the highest degree of honour, peace, and security to which mortality or immortality can attain !

2. Holiness is the love of purity, and if not in a perfect, yet in a growing degree, the possession thereof. This indeed is involved in its being a communion with God. As we cannot have love or attainment in holiness without loving him, so we cannot have fellowship with him without the love of purity. He is the "pure and holy God." We may, to some limited extent, associate with a mere man, and yet not admire or be affected by all his attributes. But the communion with God is a spiritual relation, which in the act itself rests on a love for the purity of his holiness. It not only delights us, but leads us to dislike the opposite, and imparts to us something of its image. It is a purity so attractive to the Christian that he is not content alone with holy admiration ; but desires to be himself without guile. While it is a purity repulsive to the unpent sinner, it is charming to the grace-growing saint. His reverence is mingled with love, as a result of growth ; for he is admitted to be a partaker, and his most ardent prayer and effort is to attain to a higher degree of holiness. When he be-

holds the stains of sin, and struggles with the besetments of temptation, it is because he has this purity in view.

Sin he abhors as impure, "a body of death," and thanking God through Jesus Christ his Lord, he desires more and more to be "Blessed as the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This part of holiness is then the sweet natural result of growth in grace. The Christian, in order to be undergoing the process of its more perfect attainment, must be advancing. The pollution of sin is such, that unless it be continually cast down by grace in exercise, it will make turbid the waters of life. Growth in grace is God's cleansing power, the precious filterer, which separates the pure, and keeps it so, by mingling it with the purity of God. It is an advance towards glory, and when our goings forth are thitherward, sin, the corrupt and impure, always lags. It does not desire to see God, or come nearer him; and hence how blessed are the results of grace-culture! It lifts us higher and higher into the uncontaminated atmosphere of spiritual delight, and by victory after victory over easily besetting sins comes well nigh delivering us from their power. Thus the purity of holiness is even here the emblem, and in part the possession of our peace.

3. Holiness is the accumulated increase of growth in grace.

It is the heaping up of treasure, not unto wrath, but unto eternal joy. Growth in grace, not only confers one height after another of spiritual attainment, but carries all its past triumphs and power with it. Holiness, as a name, represents not merely one result, but a grand accretion and combination of effects, each glorious in itself. It is not one fruit, but the appointed title for all fruits of the Spirit. It is the accumulation of the undecayed, inconsumable harvests of grace.

It may seem like reasoning in a circle to speak of holiness

as both the growth, and the result of growth ; but if so, we cannot help it. The plan of that perfected redemption, of which this is the joy, is a circle continually flowing into itself. Means, results, power, and instruments, cause and effects, are continually mingling and commingling, to make up this round globe of boundless love. The increase is with the increase of God. The rules of human logic are not contradicted, but so far surpassed by gracious experience and emotion, as to be of lesser consequence.

To the soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness, in fellowship with Jesus, loving purity, accumulating grace, argument is like persuading the hungry man to partake of an ample bounty while he is already a feasting guest. Though conclusive, it is needless. He who is growing knows by feeling it, how holiness is a result, a cause, and an accumulation of increase. Speak of it either as a means or an end, the soul cares not which, if in its own full joy it obtains the result. Holiness as the fruit of growth, and of a use of the means of growth, is the healthful expansion of the sanctified heart. It is an increase "upward and downward, inward and outward; upward, in heavenly meditation, downward, in humility and self-abasement ; inward, in closer union to Christ as the spring of all true Christian growth, and outward, in a life and conversation fruitful in good works."

4. Holiness is a desirable result of growth in grace, because it is an assurance of our "perseverance" until complete in glory.

It is a present partaking of the evidence of final acceptance in the Beloved. It is an actual advance on the journey heavenward, and makes addition to the faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The term perseverance is well chosen, not only in a theological but practical sense. It is a passing on; the true perseverance which conquers all; the perseverance of holiness. With the blessing now, it has the promise of the life which is to come verified, and is the earnest of the better inheritance. The man who can perceive the love and the exercise of holiness becoming more and more the habit of his life, has a pledge of final triumph. He knows the truth of the promise, because he feels within what this act of perseverance is. He is getting to the end, which is but a new beginning, not only by human periods of time, but by the years of his grace. He is experiencing from his own knowledge and trial (as the apostle Jude has associated it,) that *building* ourselves on the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost and keeping in the love, is the way to be kept from falling, and to be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

Holiness or sanctification as the result of growth in grace is thus exhibited even in these few particulars, as desirable enough to awaken the energies of every true disciple. May we here on earth use the means, enjoy the growth, and have more and more of this holiness as its blessed fruit.

SECTION II.

HAPPINESS.

Happiness is another of the results of grace-growth, of which we may here be the partakers. Happiness, even in worldly ambition is the ultimatum of effort. The candidate for wealth hopes to be made happy by his riches; for fame, by his honour and influence; the labourer, by his joy in the welfare of his

family, or in the satisfaction of his appetites and desires. But happiness is a higher definition for the Christian. It is the happiness of grace; the happiness of growth therein; the happiness of holiness, communion with God, purity, increase of grace, perseverance, and the "full enjoyment of God through all eternity." In start and progress, as well as in endless existence, it is a happiness stayed on God, and sustained by the fulness which is in him. It is another of the representative central ideas of religion. If it vary here, it is not because of its nature, but of its culture and surroundings. That steady growth in grace which adds to holiness, will make it more uniform and stable, than any earthly enjoyment. We have it in perpetuity, progressing with grace here, and enduring with eternity hereafter. Christian happiness is incident to holiness. The Gospel is a Gospel of peace, and God as he now manifests himself to his people, is eminently a God for our happiness. The Christian name, under which the Holy Spirit is conferred upon the believer, is the Comforter. We sometimes imagine, that had we lived during the mission of Christ to earth, and associated with him, we should have had more of the fruits and comforts of grace. But ours is a better heritage. We have both the Comforter and the Intercessor. "It is," said Jesus in his valedictory charge, "expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go away, I will send him unto you." "I will pray the Father who shall give you *another* Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. Thus, besides the Comforter, who is our prevailing Advocate on high, we have another abiding Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, to keep a plenitude of peace. Is there not substance for happiness here? The Christian's happiness is and is to be a result of grace; and growth and sancti-

fication alone can make it the prevailing, abiding experience. Our happiness here chiefly consists,

1. In the joy and peace of a faith in exercise.

We thus have nearness of access to the mercy-seat. The ark abideth in our house, as it did of old, in the house of Obededom. All the pure happiness of the saint, is derived from his union with Christ, and it is an active faith that keeps this union distinct and enjoyed. The channel of conveyance is then open. "The joy and peace of believing," flow in thereby, and are made experienced realities. To the grace-growing Christian, these are not an imagination, a barren description, or a set phrase of words. It is the indwelling satisfaction which is the accompaniment of a lively faith. Faith, even in the believer, when not in exercise, will tremble as did Peter at the voice of a servant-maid; but strong in the Holy Ghost with the accumulation of grace, it will stand fearless before the assembled dignitaries of a nation, and preach the truth with a holy boldness. A wavering faith hath no peace; but that firm reliance which results from a steady growth by a diligent use of appointed means, imparts that happiness of which peace and joy are component parts. A firm belief in respect to the certainty of success in any desire of our heart, is always an element of power and comfort. But in Christianity, it is not only evidence, but substance. It has in it joy, because stayed upon God. It is the happiness of a felt reliance. It can joyfully say, under any emergency, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to

separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here is Christian happiness. No wonder Paul had peace and contentment of spirit. The foundation of such hope is sure. Here is a source of Christian delight, which the world can neither give nor take away; with which a stranger intermeddleth not; to which the formal professor can never attain. If intermitted here by the burden of sin, to the growing Christian its absence is but the exception; joy and peace are the rule of his existence. If the disciple is not growing in grace, he has not the satisfaction of that exercised faith, which is inseparable from growth. Among the apostles, none seemed so steadfastly unmoved by the temptations of the world, and to abound in grace, as did the apostle John. He appears to have lived an uninterrupted life of joy, and peace, and holiness; and his was pre-eminently a life of faith in exercise. When others wavered, he was firm. When at the intimation of there being a traitor among the twelve, each seemed to fear lest he himself were a deceived one, the timid, amiable, retiring John was bold in faith to ask, Who is it? When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection at the sea of Tiberias, and none of the others knew him, John declared, "It is the Lord." There is sweet joy and peace to the Christian, in the daily recognition of his Saviour; and this is faith in exercise, a legitimate part of the happiness of growth in grace.

2. This happiness consists in the comforts of holiness.

As sin is the sole cause of all discomfort, discontent, unhappiness, so its very absence is by necessity a state of peace. Holiness by one degree after another releases us from its dominion; and hence, in its very nature, involves a state of enjoyment. We cannot conceive of perfect holiness, without

perfect happiness. The more complete our holiness is, the more complete must be our happiness. Even in a simply negative view, this holiness is a happiness ; because the absence more or less perfect of the cause of offence. Growth in grace by thus bringing us nearer to God removes us farther from the discontent of sin. But the comforts of holiness are something more than the absence of an offending cause. It is not only the triumph over Satan, but the presence with God.

We rejoice, not only as those released from sin's supreme dominion, but as those exalted to communion with the blessed Redeemer, and with the Father of our spirits. Not only is the great enemy under our feet, but the starry crown upon our heads, and the great God our active Father-friend. It is not only immunity from the curse, but the positive inheritance of a fulness of blessing. Not only is a debt cancelled, but a patrimony secured. Holiness is therefore a comfortable state, both as a victory over sin, and because it has as a bounty nothing less than the grace of the Son of God. Here is not only connection broken between man and the cause of misery ; but union established between man and the fountain of joy and peace. It is a communion, a conferred conjoint enjoyment with our Saviour ; and how else can it be but that there should be happiness in this ? In what way can we expect so fully to be made partakers of it here, as by receiving this grace, and then growing in it ? We cannot picture the saint's life on earth as an elysium, only because we are not completely delivered from the effects of sin ; and are not complete in him who is the Head. But the more we grow in grace, the nearer we come to escaping from the one and having completeness in the other. The comforts of holiness then are a part of that happiness which is the result of growth in grace. It may not, it will not, while

we are in the body, deliver from all affliction, trial, or disappointment. But this it will do. While the growing saint escapes many of these, it will overturn the calculations of men as to what trials are, and extract sweets from the bitter, and originate real happiness amidst the poverty, pain, and disasters, which are fatal to the comforts of all but the growing Christian. The religion of the flourishing Christian naturally rids him from many of the annoyances of life, because many of these are the direct results of personal transgression. Besides, even when trials come, it causes him to go on rejoicing in that he is counted worthy to suffer, if need be, for the cause of Christ. This is not merely happiness by contrast, comparison, or construction; but happiness real, absolute, tangible, which in the night of sorrow, can sing songs of joy, which in trouble can lean on the arm of a beloved; and in the decline of earthly hopes cause the death-bed to be comfortable with the consolations of a spiritual reliance. The ungodly cannot have such experience, for it has no foundation for them. The dwarfed professor cannot, for joy and peace are not the fruits of a barren fig tree. But the grace-growing Christian will have that holiness whose comforts are a happiness even in the present world.

3. This happiness of grace-growth consists in the witness of the Spirit.

It is what Halyburton calls, "the comfortable persuasion of one's own salvation." I cannot believe that uncertainty as to our interest in grace, as to our title to the saint's everlasting rest, was ever meant to be the prevailing experience of the true Christian. In its very nature our profession and faith is so momentous a thing, that both reason and religion bid us not be content with anything less than a comfortable assurance of

hope. The good hope through grace, is something more than doubting guess-work. It is a reasonable expectation. In Scripture, the word is not used in the doubtful sense in which it is sometimes employed in the language of daily life; not a hope like that of the physician, doubtful as to the life of his patient; or of one in deep anxiety hoping, as we say, against hope. The hope of the Scriptures is therein spoken of as a comfort. It is an exaltation of faith. We are to add to faith, hope. It is to be as an *anchor to the soul*, sure and steadfast. We are to have the hope of salvation as a *helmet*. It is referred to as a "full assurance, a firm, lively hope," as a definite, sensible, sure experience of the soul. Abiding, Christian happiness cannot be the state of one who is generally in doubt as to the saving nature of his faith. His is a weak, trembling, wavering faith, unstable in all its ways. He has the fear that hath torment, rather than that fear which is a holy reverence and love, a perfect love which casteth out the doubting fear. To the Christian there are but two methods by which this hope can indeed exist as one that hath surety, and maketh not ashamed. The first is in conversion, when we have the Spirit bearing witness with ours that we are the children of God. We can only retain the witness, secondly, by that diligent use of the means of grace which always results in growth in grace. But the *witness of the Spirit*, and the *assurance of hope derived from grace-culture*, are not always to be viewed as two distinct things. The happiness of grace-growth is a witness of the Spirit, since, through its agency, we make this progress. It is worthy of note, how universally the sure hope of the righteous is spoken of in the Bible, in connexion with the work of an active holy life. "Our diligence is to be to the full assurance of hope that we be not slothful." We

are not "to sleep, but watch," in order to have this defence of hope. We are to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts; if we would be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear. This is not the fear of hesitation, or doubt, but of humble gratitude.

That chapter in Romans which sets forth the security of believers in Christ begins thus; "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who *walk not* after the flesh, but after the spirit." It is to the spiritually-minded, that the Spirit is life and peace. It is to those that "live not after the flesh, but do mortify the deeds of the body," that the spirit beareth witness with their's that they are the children of God. This requires growth on our part, and this is the high-road of happiness. This witness of the Spirit is not to be expected when we are sleeping at our posts. It grows out of grace in exercise, out of performed duty. We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. Doing his will, we know of the doctrine, and are able to say, "I know whom I have believed." Grace-growing, like Paul we may say, "We know, we have a building with God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The language of the epistle of John is, "We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, and every man that hath this hope purifieth himself." Never, never was the Christian life expected to be an uncertainty as to heaven. The witness of the Spirit is the comforting evidence, and the evidence of the Comforter which we are to aim to have. Not relying upon any supernatural mode of assurance, we are to seek the proof by diligence in the means of grace. Thus this does become a blessed part of our happiness. A prevailing

confidence of the favour of God, and of his indwelling grace, is thus a legitimate and essential part of the sustaining happiness of the Christian, and is to be secured by our growth in grace through the Spirit blessing the means. This is the true heart's-ease.

The experience of eminent saints well confirms this view. Making progress in holiness by appointed instrumentalities they have been able to say in life and in death, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." Disease, or despondency, may for a little time have obscured the clear sky of hope, or their own derelictions from duty cast a shade upon the evidence. But take the summary of religious biography, and it records as the rule, the prevalence of a comfortable hope through grace, as only the fruit of earnest, faithful heart-culture.

Reason, revelation, and experience, thus unite in declaring that the witness of the Spirit, the assurance of hope, is a reasonable part of Christian happiness, and still more is the delightful reward of those who grow most rapidly in grace. To such, if interrupted, it is only for a time, because of some imperfection in duty, or because God has thus "afflicted them for a moment, that with everlasting kindness he may have mercy upon them."

Diligence in the exercise of the means of growth, reliance upon God, sanctification of the body and the spirit to Christ, a constant aiming after higher attainments in the divine life, can not habitually exist, without good evidence through grace of acceptance in the Beloved; and this will be with the confidence that he who has begun the good work, will indeed complete it. Such is a constituent part of that happiness which results

from grace culture : a holy peace, and trust, and hope ; the " hope of glory," which is here a given part of the riches of the glory which is in Christ. Comfort and joy, assurance of peace, are thus made prevalent on earth, while to the eye of faith the gates of the New Jerusalem are thrown open, that through the distance, we may catch hopeful views of the perfect happiness beyond.

By the sadness of doubt as to the critical question of the soul's safety, by the privileges which reason, revelation, and experience declare to be those of the growing saint, by the fulness of the means of growth, and by the glory of that happiness which even here may be secured by the blessed knowledge, let us anew " lay hold on eternal life," and obtain " the effect of righteousness which is quietness and assurance for ever."

This happiness consists,

4. In the prospect of complete felicity in heaven.

It is a happiness which is to be in every respect perfected. Incompleteness, instability, mars and defaces all earthly glory. It shall be rolled up as a scroll. The sentence of the law is upon it. But ours is a happiness through grace. Time cannot limit it, for its origin is from eternity. There is not an element of sadness, an atom for decay about it. It is the foretaste of unspotted felicity, and the prospect of the future, adds its crowning gladness to the joy of the present. If sin or Providence mark a check now and then upon it here, growth in grace never does ; and we see how all things work together for our good, and make us joyous in the expectation of happiness complete above. As through grace abounding, we move on to the higher spheres of happiness on earth, we can more anticipate what this felicity completed will be above.

Even more; there is reason to believe that our growth in grace here, as to degree, has to do with happiness hereafter. To all who receive the crown, it will be complete. But as one on earth may have a higher sensibility of happiness than another, without in any way limiting another's joy, so the grace which has been cultured to its highest fruitfulness here, will be the better prepared for entrance upon glory hereafter. He with but five talents shall with other five enter into the joy of his Lord; but he with ten shall have also other ten, with which to enter upon a more advanced capability of enjoyment. If the saints shall be higher than the angels, there are grades of felicity above; and he who by growth in grace is the beloved disciple here, may sit higher in heavenly places than they who, though perfect in bliss, made the narrowest escape from the pit. "Their works do follow them." "They that be wise [or teachers] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." "He shall reward every man according to his works." "My reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." It is a motive for gratitude, inviting to growth in grace, when one has been brought early into the kingdom, and been permitted for a long period fully to enjoy growth in holiness. Such even here have the privilege of a higher happiness, and a brighter prospect of the perfected felicity hereafter. The general epistle of Peter presents a powerful motive, when it says, "Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The happiness of this assurance, felt as it only can be by him who proves the title to his inheritance

by the fruits of growth, will lighten the burden of many a trial here, and make life itself radiant with blissful hopes of immortality hereafter.

If such things be true of the holiness and happiness secured by growth in grace on earth, and if human language scarce avails to describe the peace and comfort of the saints here, what shall we say of the completed triumph of our faith, the final stupendous result of grace and its culture.

SECTION III.

HEAVEN.

Grace, growth, and glory; holiness, happiness, heaven. Such is the grand precession and advance of spiritual life. Heavenly glory is the crowning excellence and fruit of grace. It is for a "*tree of life*" here, but it is to be transplanted as a living tree for immortality hereafter.

Heaven is the joyous result. Now we can no longer appeal to reason or experience; for this is something beyond them both. Good and evil are so mingled in the world, and the sources of misery are so placed side by side with those of peace, that human nature furnishes us no data upon which to reckon, as to the great reward of the righteous in the world to come. We can only turn to the inspired word for this firm foundation of our faith, and rejoice in the hopes of an eternity to come. Even here only so much is told us to give us some faint conceptions of the glory that is to be revealed. Full and minute description is not given. But so far as glimpses are furnished, they fully justify the fondest hopes, the most ecstatic anticipations. The most significant expressions of beauty and peace, the most picturesque views of enchanting loveliness, the sub-

limest portraitures of enjoyed grandeur and holy delight, are there given, in order that so far as words can express it, there should be conveyed to us an idea of the future bliss of the people of God.

“He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment.” “I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my new name.” “God shall wipe away all tears from every eye.” “He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely.”

The holy Jerusalem shall have the glory of God, her light clear as crystal, its walls of jasper, the city as gold, its gates pearls, and its foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it, and the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. There are the river and the tree of life, and there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall reign for ever and ever.

As our senses can in some measure delight in the glories of earth, the Spirit condescends by such comparisons, to afford us some view of the better country, while it adds such assurances of the reign of Christ, and our relation to him, as cannot but fill the devout heart with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and with life-acting desire, by full growth in grace, to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Such are a few of the twilight gleamings and illustrations, which revelation pours down from the heavenly heights, to incite

us to press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

We have not, like the angel who talked with John in Patmos, "a golden reed to measure the city," and cannot come nearer to a description of the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of its immeasurable glory, than to read over and over the sublime picturings of holy Writ. But though we may not span the degree, we do know something of the nature of this heavenly glory. It is to consist,

1. In a glorified presence with God.
2. In communion and fellowship with the saints, and the holy angels.
3. In holiness and happiness, complete in fullness, and endless in duration.

The first is the highest glory of heaven.

"Not all the harps above
Can make a heav'nly place,
If God his residence remove,
Or but conceal his face."

It is to be forever with the Lord. It is to be partaker of the fullness of the Godhead. It is the completed union with Christ, as our living head. The marriage supper of the Lamb has come. Christ receives us to himself. "A little while, and ye shall not see me, and again a little while and ye shall see me because I go to the Father," is the language of his farewell address. "I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am." "I ascend to my Father, and your Father." "He that seeth me seeth my Father also." "The Spirit and

the bride say come." It is the family re-union in the Father's mansion. Christ our Redeemer, our Saviour, our Elder Brother, is there. The work of his redemption and intercession for us is now complete. Through him we are welcomed to the Father's presence. The prodigal son, with the robe of righteousness upon him, has come home, and parental affection is bestowed with the fulness of a God. When he who is our life shall appear, we also shall appear with him in glory. We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The image which was marred in the fall, will be fully restored in the glory. It will not be merely a presence of observation, but of union and experience. It is a communion with the Father of our spirits. Those attributes which he has exercised toward us, will then be manifested in the full effulgence of grace perfected in glory. His word, his providence, his works, and those immortal faculties of which we could scarce conceive on earth, will then unfold to our delighted vision, in their unobstructed grandeur, and we shall be made partakers thereof. Especially the finished work of redemption will be the theme of holy wonder, and devout praise. We shall see and feel how "God has loved us with an everlasting love." "Our eyes shall see the King in his beauty, and we shall behold the land that is now far off." God the Father, as giving his Son to die for us; Christ the Redeemer, as suffering for us the penalty of sin, and the author of the purchased redemption now enjoyed; and the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, will appear as the one God in power and glory, in justice, goodness, in grace and love. We shall delight ourselves in our God, and be glad in the Lord always. Ours too will be a glorified presence. The soul will be there all beautiful within. The mind will be there with its knowledge sanctified, and with its powers of acquisition multi-

plied. The body shall be raised incorruptible and full of glory, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. This corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality. Death shall be swallowed up in victory. "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ," shall be the full-choired chorus to the song of salvation for ever and ever. Thus with body, soul, mind, all sanctified, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in glory, and with God the Father, the Redeemer, the Comforter there, what is wanting to complete the joy? "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness."

There is nothing even to lead us to conclude that there will be a cessation in our advancement in grace and knowledge when heaven is attained. Not only will grace insure us perfect peace and our growth in grace and knowledge tell upon our capacity for a "full reward hereafter," but the nature of redemption and the scenes which in heaven will surround us would lead us to conclude that the saints shall ever be increasing in the knowledge of God and in the enjoyments of grace by the new means for growth now conferred. He that once receives this grace on earth has his title to heaven, yet this is no reason why he should not increase therein, but rather the surety that he will. So he that once enters the New Jerusalem has his heaven complete, yet this is no proof that he shall not pass on from one degree of glory to another, to be not only a conqueror but more than a conqueror through him who hath loved us and given himself for us. No idea of heaven is conveyed to us in Scripture which limits the holy development of our grace or knowledge, and they who have

drank deepest of these divine fountains on earth, have been most decided in the faith, that these are but the beginnings of the unlimited expansion of Paradise. The ways of God then made more fully known to man, the seen perfections of his attributes, and the propriety of his providence, the glory of his works and the mind freed not only from the dominion but from the taint or presence of sin, will have enough for present joy and for continued advance to fill the soul with rapturous delight. "In thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

2. The communion with the saints and the angels shall be another part of this heavenly glory.

That which is a spiritual part of our happiness here, shall not cease in the hereafter. Communion with God, and communion with the brethren, are two distinctive marks of grace here, and neither shall be dimmed in the world to come. As the old earth passeth away for a new heaven and a new earth, everything which marred complete fellowship here shall be done away. No longer can any misconception or difference arise; none shall say, I have no need of thee. But as members one of another, and joined in Christ, each shall add to the other's joys, and the purest attachments of this life be feeble compared with that bond of love which unites the saints in heaven. The redeemed are every where spoken of in Scripture as a family, a household, a company. At the last day, as the dead in Christ rise, they who are alive shall be caught up in company with them to be together for ever with the Lord. They are a General Assembly. They are represented as together before the throne of God, serving him day and night in his temple, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them, and the Lamb in the midst of them shall feed

them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. Those whose souls have gone before us, cannot come to us, but we shall go to them. They who are before the throne are clothed in the same white robes, and a multitude that no man can number, not as those incidentally together, but as brethren in Christ, and touched by that grace-implanted sympathy, which, while it unites them to Jesus, in the same affection unites them to each other, as they together cry, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb." Nor shall we be strangers there. Holy men of whom we have read or heard, and those of our own friends and acquaintances, who before or after us enter the heavenly kingdom, shall add to our blissful happiness. They that come from the east and west shall sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Moses, Elias, Samuel, and Lazarus shall have a personality in glory, as well as on earth. Paul writes both to the Thessalonians and Corinthians, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

"As ye have acknowledged us in part that we are your rejoicing as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." Such congratulations would have no force, unless Paul, and those converted by his ministry, were to recognize each other in the world to come. The Thessalonians were exhorted not to mourn over their deceased members as those without hope; and were comforted with the assurance that they should see them and with them be for ever in the presence of the Lord. Indeed the whole tenor of the inspired word is, that the saints are to dwell together, as the one happy family of the redeemed. We cannot conceive that those who have known Christian fellowship on earth, shall not have among their joys the remembrance and

enjoyment of it in heaven. As we sit together in heavenly places, the mutual recognition of God's dealing with us, and of his mercy in bringing us to glory, will excite new ascriptions of gratitude and praise.

The holy angels too are a part of this glorious company. "We are come to Mount Zion to an innumerable company of angels." What delightful companionship will that be? They recognize us even now. There was joy among them in heaven when first thou wast known as "a sinner saved." Are they not now "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" They are witnesses of the scenes of earth, and when the redeemed of the Lord shall come with everlasting songs upon their lips, when saved souls shall be joined to glorified bodies, and the family of heaven shall be complete, with what rapturous delight will they mingle in our joys, and do their part in contributing to increasing knowledge and endless delight.

Of such material is the fellowship of glory. God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, three in one; the saints of the past, the present, the future, all of the purified by grace of which the world has ever been a home; and all the holy angels who have so long worshipped before the throne, and who have been the messengers of grace to our fallen humanity; is not the prospect of such a company as this, a glorious stimulus to grace-culture? Ought we on earth to be content with striving only for the lowest honour among the candidates for heavenly immortality? Is it not worth prayer, and labour, and zeal here, not only to join such a company there, but to join it as those who have made large progress in the divine life? Oh! if this grace is implanted, it is the *power* of an endless life. It will desire a ripening for heaven. Is it not an argument for growth,

that "none in anywise shall lose his reward?" Shall we not be inspired by every syllable of that joyous verse: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth, yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and *their works do follow them*?" Is it not an argument grand as faith in God and heaven can make it, to use all the means of growth in grace, and use all diligence, when we rejoice in the thoughts of the society we are to join? "Ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the General Assembly and Church of the First Born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." He that amid such prospects is content to sleep, and who does not feel it a duty to grow in grace, has no right to expect to be saved at all. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away." "Herein is the Father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." So through the mercy of the everlasting God we shall be preserved from falling, and with an abundant entrance administered unto us, we shall join with angels and the spirits of the just made perfect in joyful ascriptions of blessing, honour, glory, and power, unto him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

4. Heaven and its glory consist in holiness and happiness, complete in fullness, and endless in duration.

We have already noticed the prospect thereof as a part of the Christian's felicity on earth; but this is the consummation and reality. Holiness and happiness, even here, have something attractive. Purity of conduct, conversation, and life,

excite our admiration, and happiness is the great acquirement after which each in his own way is striving. The beauty of holiness, the Christian can even here in some small degree conceive, and if by the grace of God he is growing in spiritual faith and knowledge, he knows more and more of that blessed state toward which he is tending.

But at best how imperfect are the holiness and happiness of earth. By reason of sin, both alike are marred. Pride, revenge, selfishness, worldliness, temptation, imperfection, detract from the one, and disappointment, affliction, sickness, and death, disturb the other. Though by the grace of God, Satan is put beneath our feet, he still lingers a serpent in the garden. As sin and misery bear the relation of cause and effect, neither holiness nor happiness can be exercised and enjoyed, as in the sphere of their unlimited glory. Even here it is blessed to see, and still more glorious to feel, how much of this holiness, by the power of a growing grace, and by the Spirit abiding within, may be experienced by the believer, and how its happiness rests the soul upon God, giving songs in the night of darkness, and crowning with inspiring comfort the prospect of futurity. But heaven is immeasurably more than this. It is holiness and happiness complete in their fulness. There will in no wise enter there anything that defileth. The curse is removed. Sin, or any shadow cast thereby, can never enter. There shall be no unhappiness. Every tear shall be wiped from every eye. The saints, with the name of their Redeemer in their foreheads, as they become sharers of infinite holiness, are by necessity sharers of infinite happiness. The completeness of both is the completeness of perfection. "We are complete in him." When we have said this, we have said all we can say, and more than this the most glowing and hopeful Christian cannot desire.

Holiness, happiness, completeness, fulness. What more can the believer ask, to incite his faith, to warm his love, to increase his zeal, and to make him "grow" in grace? Surely, nothing save one assurance, and that we have. *It is endless in duration.* "The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." It is an "everlasting possession, an everlasting righteousness," a "pleasure for evermore," "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "We shall come to Zion with songs of everlasting joy," sharers in the "mercy of the Lord from everlasting to everlasting." On earth sin has abounded, but now grace much more abounds. The holiness is endless purity, and the happiness is endless, because the holiness is. In the possession of the one in glory, we cannot be without the other. They are one in the blessed wedlock of grace. United to Christ, we sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, nevermore to go out, but evermore to join in the song of redeeming love. We read of Flavel in his "Day of Heaven," as he termed the one in which he felt the nearest access to the throne; of Edwards in sweet converse with Jehovah, until rapturous with holy delight; of Payson when the glory of God and of heaven was so manifested to him, that he looked out as upon a sea of love; but what are such temporary ecstasies, compared with the unlimited ages of eternal joy, when ages of years, and epochs of time, which years cannot express, shall still be rolling on, filled with immeasurable glory, and the holiness and happiness of the most happy and holy day on earth, be multiplied by an infinity of degree and of duration.

There are still other descriptions under which we might contemplate heaven, as the final, precious result of redemption, and a blessed stimulus to growth in grace. It is "a better

country," "a building of God," "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It is the rest of the people of God, not of sleep, for the glorified have holiness and happiness in exercise, and this is all the refreshment they need, but it is a rest from sin and sorrow, from every thing that shall offend; a rest upon the arm of our beloved, an everlasting rest that remaineth for the people of God; a rest of which Paul as an inspired, and Baxter as a grace-thriving Christian, have said enough to guide our souls amidst the delights of holy contemplations. But why need any other views than those already taken, be added to encourage us to grow up into the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, that we may partake of the full riches of such an inheritance? A presence with God in his glory, a union and communion with him, a fellowship with saints and angels, a holiness and happiness complete in its fulness, and endless in its duration; what desire or conception can we have of a heaven better than this?

But when on wings of faith and prayer, mind and soul have obtained their noblest earthly elevation, there comes a voice from the excellent glory, more thrilling than all beside. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." "What we know not now, we shall know hereafter." "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." It is a sure land of promise unto us; and going on from grace to grace, we shall at length reach its blissful shores and spend an eternity amidst its untold joys. Such is the end and triumph of our faith. "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," is the

welcome greeting. Only he who is a slothful servant need tremble at his prospect. For all others the invitation is already appointed. "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Commencing with the theme of grace, and making, as was designed, the subject of growth in grace the main matter for extended consideration, we have thus in conclusion traced its final glory. Growth in grace, the means therefor, and the evidences thereof, are so associated with glory, and so identified therewith, both in revelation and experience, that we know of no other road by which to travel to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the highway of holiness, along which Christ is the guide. If we step aside, we fall into the slough of despond; if we sleep, like Bunyan's Pilgrim, we lose our roll, and are troubled at once to find it. Doddridge in his beautiful hymn on grace, in the final couplet of a single verse, describes the practical method of advance.

"Grace led my roving feet
To tread the heavenly road;
And new supplies each hour I meet
While pressing on to God."

1 We are not to wait expecting a sign. If we improve not by the appointed means of grace, we would not grow, though one came from heaven itself to tell us more. To every Christian, God has appointed his own personal growth in grace, as the great business of his life. To get good, as well as to be good, and to do good, is the end and aim of Christian life.

Grace in its nature and inception, in the full provision of means for its culture, in the immense outlay which God has made for our progress, in its evidences, and in its results, invites

us to put on the *whole* armour of God, to go on from grace to grace, to gather strength unto everlasting life. The last invitation, which the last apostle heard from the almost heavenly Patmos, was not only to partake of the water of life; but the sweet call of the blessed Spirit thrills along the line of ages: "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life *freely*." We are invited to the "fulness of the riches." Grace is the foundation, and glory the crowning excellence. The grace is so exhaustless, and the glory so transcendent, that we are not to suspend ourselves as in an idle vacuum between the two. We are to labour to enter into that rest. We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his good pleasure. We are to grow in grace and in knowledge. If the Christian can only be led to appreciate his spiritual privileges, to practice the duty, and use the means of growth, he needs not to hear from another much about the evidences and results of his increase. These his own blissful experience will secure, and God will put underneath and about him his everlasting arms of love, and be his support in the endeavour. A promise being left us of the rest, let us not seem to come short of it. It has been the design of these pages to awaken the reader to a sense of the duty and privileges which, as Christians, are vouchsafed unto us. We have only partially considered themes full of comfort and encouragement to every one desiring evermore to be fed with this spiritual abundance. We have but indicated the methods of advance. It is for each to follow out the subject in the sweet details of a holy meditation and a blessed experience.

May we with heaven-prompted longing and resolve, be able to say, "Not as though I had already attained, either

were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." With the earnest persuasion that we are thus ever to be growing in grace and in knowledge, we shall go on from grace to grace, and become meet for the inheritance of the saints; and such words as these, bound together by the chords of God's love, will be the passwords of the soul to its immortal peace.

GRACE,.....GROWTH,.....GLORY

FAITH,.....WORKS,.....PERFECTION;

ACCEPTANCE,.....PROGRESS,.....VICTORY;

HOLINESS,.....HAPPINESS,.....HEAVEN.

"May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." And now, brethren in the diligent use of these means of growth, "let us commend each other to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

THE END.



